The Sorcerer King of Destruction and the GOLEM of the Barbarian Queen

NOVEL

01

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LAME PAJAMAS
By the time I realized it, I was standing smack-dab in the middle of a field, wearing my stupidly lame pajamas.
BARBARIAN QUEEN
The cruel and beautiful goddess in front of their eyes was like the golem of the Barbarian Queen. Her body was slender and symmetrical, like that of a flawless goddess. Her long, silky white hair was almost translucent. Her sparkling ruby eyes drew in any who dared gaze upon her. And those strange, elongated ears... Everyone present recognized the shape of those ears. They belonged to the race of ancient legends, the "People of the Valley."
CONJURED EARTH SOLDIERS:
GOLEMS
Powerful yet silent servants with absolute loyalty toward their creator.
SUMMONING THE
SORCERER KING
You, who opened this book that sleeps beside my corpse. Should a living soul set foot inside this stone chamber, it can only mean that a thousand years have passed since the spell *Summon the Sorcerer King of Destruction* destroyed the old world. The timer mechanism sealing the Grand Stone Gate has been released.
EARTH
DRAGON
A being who exists outside of reason. The ancient Earth Dragon cannot be killed.
The Sorcerer King of Destruction and the GOLEM of the Barbarian Queen
LET'S GO,
PARTNER

With a jump, Gol soared through the air like a bird, landed on the Earth Dragon's back, and let loose a crazed rush of punches on the giant creature's spine. Her flurry of blows flew left and right in quick succession.
However, the ancient Earth Dragon did not fall.

The Sorcerer King of Destruction and the GOLEM of the Barbarian Queen

01

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illustrated by
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Seven Seas Entertainment

HAMETSU NO MADOO TO GOLEM NO BANHI VOL. 1

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Illustrated by Shiba

First published in Japan in 2018 by
KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.
English translation rights arranged with
KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.

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ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: Adam Arnold
PUBLISHER: Jason DeAngelis

ISBN: 978-1-64505-861-8
Printed in Canada
First Printing: November 2020
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Prologue

GOLEMS: one of the strongest weapons man could wield in this world. Powerful soldiers to a one, each golem was conjured by an ancient Earth spell.

Some golem wielders used these fearsome weapons as loyal guard dogs. Others manipulated them in combat as their own arms and legs. Foot soldiers equipped with spears or bows could never hope to scratch a military-grade, heavy-class golem clad in thick armor, which could even deflect powerful attacks from skilled spellcasters.

Words inevitably failed to describe the destructive force born from a golem's consecutive blows. One slice from a golem's unique weapon reduced even the most valiant of knights on the most powerful of steeds to meaningless chunks of meat. A formidable fortress wall capable of withstanding waves of enemies would fare no better, and would be as effortlessly demolished as a rotten wood fence.

These military-grade, heavy-class golems were the most powerful weapons available to deploy in land battles. At least, that was the common wisdom.

In the ashen valley in the north of Kinas, every member of the territory's elite Earth squadron stood stupefied by the scene before them.

"A-annihilated… But their opponent is just a single unarmed light-class golem. How…"

The squadron typically utilized thirteen heavy golems. In less than forty seconds, every one of these had been obliterated by that one far smaller golem. This was an absolutely inconceivable turn of events.

The man standing atop the cliff across from the squadron was the one controlling this graceful white golem. The world knew next to nothing about him. Nevertheless, he was known by several aliases: *Nightmare of Tibar. Slayer of a thousand adventurers. Return of the legendary golem wielder, Tetheo Madith…*

The squadron had heard rumors of their opponent's unparalleled combat record, along with numerous questionable anecdotes. However, not a single member believed a word of the hearsay. They saw it all as hyperbolic bar gossip. They acknowledged the rumors might hold a portion of truth if, say, this man was exceptionally hostile to strangers who showed him discourtesy. But even if he was unusually powerful, the members of the Earth squadron had no doubt any one of them could defeat him.

And while they all knew "Tetheo Madith" as an infamous golem wielder from a time before some of them were even born, none comprehended the true strength of the man who had inherited that name.

To pump themselves up for the battle, the squadron members had laughed as they bet on who amongst them would take this man down and

thereby increase their reputation. The winnings were to be used for top-quality wine to celebrate their successful mission and safe return.

Then, an area of the broad valley had echoed with an explosive roar. A devastating shockwave rattled the conifers and sent up billowing clouds of dust, in which mangled pieces of thick black armor danced majestically through the air.

The last golem, the one controlled by the squadron's captain, finally sank to the ashen ground. Amidst the massacre, the white golem stood calm and still, utterly unfazed.

Eyes wide, the squadron members gasped in unison. One of the reasons for this was, of course, terror. However, another emotion also held them. The white golem standing before them was unspeakably lovely.

Her body was slender and symmetrical, like that of a flawless goddess. Her long, silky white hair was almost translucent. Her sparkling ruby eyes drew in any who dared gaze upon her. And those strange, elongated ears… Everyone present recognized the shape of those ears. They belonged to the race of ancient legends, the "People of the Valley."

Along with that, they recalled a title that appeared in those legends:

Barbarian Queen.

The cruel and beautiful goddess in front of their eyes was like the golem of the Barbarian Queen.

Chapter 1:
Beginning and Choice

BY THE TIME I REALIZED IT, I was standing smack-dab in the middle of a field, wearing my stupidly lame pajamas.

The pajamas had yellow cats printed on them… No, wait, were they tanuki? Anyway, the repeating faces of this yellow mystery creature were printed close together. These were my cheaply made, blue, long-sleeved pajamas. And they were pretty awful-looking. This was definitely not a design a forward-thinking youth should consider acceptable sleepwear.

Well, I had bought them myself the other day at my neighborhood shopping mall. I chose them, of course, because they were cheap. But that wasn't the only reason. Left at the bottom of the barrel with no one willing to take a chance on these ugly cats…or, hmm. Were they perhaps pigs? Anyway, I felt some kind of deep pity toward these animals.

But let's put that aside for a bit. It wasn't the time to be mulling the lame-factor of my pajamas. The real issue was why I was standing in the middle of this field. I thought I had been sleeping on my futon back at home, but I appeared to be in an open meadow.

"Where the heck is this? Is this…a dream…?"

The sun had risen quite a bit already. The meadow was encircled by groves of verdant, broad-leaved trees. The wind trailed through the branches and blew delicate waves in the prolific undergrowth.

I was left with the impression of pastoral beauty. Although this place did seem uninhabited and a bit lonely, it also felt like a garden of sorts.

At that moment, I suddenly realized my feet were uncomfortable. It appeared that the only area not covered with grass was under my feet. I wasn't wearing any shoes, so my bare soles were cold. I wasn't standing on dirt, either; it felt like concrete, or possibly stone. Then, as I casually dropped my gaze to get a better look, I started.

"Whoa, what the heck is this?!" I unintentionally shouted.

I was standing on top of a blood-red stone floor. Furthermore, an eerie geometric pattern had been drawn on it in a circle. The diameter of this enigmatic pattern was probably roughly 150 centimeters, and it just screamed "magic circle." I didn't know any other more suitable phrase.

Also, no matter how I looked at it, it wasn't exactly evocative of magic from some dreamy, fantasy fairy tale. What was a more appropriate description for this creepy thing…? If I had to, I'd say it gave off the impression of the setting for a human sacrifice ritual by a devil-worshipping cult. All in all, it was clear at first glance that this magic circle was ominous as hell.

Rust-red lines were painted—though don't ask me with what kind of paint—close together in an intricate pattern, as if a bunch of snakes had

slithered around each other. Even more minute patterns were drawn in the minuscule blank spaces between these lines, further filling the pattern.

Even if none of these patterns had a particular meaning, drawing them must have taken a ton of time and energy. I didn't understand any of them, but I knew the person who drew them must have been incredibly tenacious. Kind of scary. Moreover, I was the one standing in the middle of the unsettling end product. Even scarier.

To tell you the truth, at that point in time, I was getting some pretty bad vibes. That being said, I was also pretty bewildered by my entire predicament. To put it bluntly, other than the fact that I was standing in the middle of a mysterious circle in my lame pajamas, I knew zip, zero, zilch, and nada.

I *did* know I didn't want to stand another second longer on that uncanny circle, so I tried to step off.

My toes hit an invisible wall. Though I'm not really sure if "wall" is the correct term for what it was. Let's say I felt resistance, like I'd hit a thick membrane of static electricity or something. This incomprehensible force field ran along the perimeter of the circular stone, surrounding me.

Eh? Wait a sec. Did that mean…I was trapped?

Are you kidding me?!

I pressed my palms against the wall and tried to push my way through —and in the very next moment, the resistance anticlimactically vanished. I staggered a few steps forward, tottering over the stone floor until forward momentum brought me outside the circle.

All of a sudden, floral scents flooded my nostrils, the dazzling sunlight of a clear day left me dizzy, and a gentle breeze caressed my cheek. It felt like I had surfaced from deep underwater, and only now were my five senses clear.

It appeared that the invisible wall surrounding the stone circle blocked even outside stimulus. At that point, I had no idea under what principle of physics it operated, but I had no other words to explain what I had just experienced.

Needless to say, I was perplexed.

The clean air and the warmth of the sun played on my senses. The all-too-real tickle of grass rustled against my feet. All these sensations combined suggested only one possible reason for everything. Simply put…

"This isn't a dream…"

I was terribly rattled by this unfathomable turn of events. But neither did I feel like I was in any immediate danger where I stood. At least I could say this field felt peaceful. The sky was blindingly blue. The whole area was quiet; there were no signs of any other living creatures, not even birdsong. The sun was sweet on my skin, the greenery idyllic, and the wind soothing.

If I ignored that clearly evil magic circle, I would've thought I'd come to enjoy a picnic.

In this relaxed state, I surveyed the surrounding trees and my eyes landed on a single troubling spot. Though trees otherwise encircled the meadow, one spot broke the line of green: a sliver of auburn rock face with a gaping hole in it. A cave.

Was it naturally formed or man-made? The inside was dark, so I couldn't make out its interior. An empty, black, gaping hole. A hole…that a person…could pass through.

At that thought, some kind of switch flipped and a strange buzzing gradually filled my head.

A hole…a person…could pass through.

Must…pass through…

Who must pass through? I-I must…?

I surrendered to this sudden, intense impulse. It was a relentless need, an obsessive desire. I wanted to enter that hole. For some reason, I could think of nothing else but doing so.

I began to walk toward the cave entrance. As I did, an unidentifiable irritation burned through me: *Run*. I clumsily tried to suppress this new compulsion, but my pace quickened.

Ten more meters till I reached the entrance.

I want to enter already.

Five meters.

Hurry up. Come on.

Two meters. My impatient feet stumbled. Four more steps. Three steps. Two steps. One step. Then—

In my haste, I slammed my pinky toe on the cave entrance.

"Owww! Urrrgghhhh!"

I let out a scream that cut the air before I began crying like a puppy. I collapsed on the ground in total agony. I hadn't injured myself on the corner of a dresser—I'd been done in by the edge of a cave.

In my excited state, my field of vision had narrowed. On top of that, the cave entrance was only wide enough to fit one person. Of course I stubbed my toe on it. Moreover, I was barefoot, and I'd smacked into it with all that momentum. Ow. Ow. Ow! No more weird compulsions, only tears now.

After moaning on the floor for a time, I slowly stood up, trembling. Yeah, full-on trembling, just like a newborn fawn. Timidly, I checked my pinky toe. I thought I would die from the pain, but it didn't seem like any bones were broken.

Now then. At this point, I realized something interesting. Even though just a moment before I had wanted nothing more than to enter the cave, driven by that indescribably intense urge, that same want had for some reason completely vanished the second I injured my pinky toe.

Strange. But at the time, it really had felt like entering the cave would be the greatest achievement of my entire life.

Yikes, what a sad life. I'm glad I came to my senses.

With my sanity retrieved, I peeked through the cave entrance. A light shone through from the other side. Huh. This wasn't a cave. It was a tunnel. I could probably pass through it. It would take a bit to reach the exit, but I didn't think it was too far.

I took a few steps back from the entrance to get a better look at the auburn rock face the cave was carved into. Aside from the tunnel, there were no other features. That meant this vertical rock face was actually a cliff. It was tall enough that you would probably faint if you tried to climb it all the way up. It easily exceeded ten meters.

On closer inspection, the auburn cliff appeared to encircle the entire area, just like the trees. In other words, I was—for some absurd reason—in the center of a basin surrounded by a cliff that was topographically isolated from the outside world. Okay, I had no way to know if I was *completely* isolated. At the very least there was that tunnel, which I suspected acted as a passageway connecting the basin to the outside.

The basin looked to be several times larger than Tokyo Dome. I wondered exactly how many times. Hmm…I couldn't be sure. Rather, once I thought about it more, I realized I had never been to Tokyo Dome. So, yeah, I wouldn't know. Why did you even use Tokyo Dome as a reference, past me?

Anyway.

To sum: This was a perfectly circular basin, several times larger than Tokyo Dome, surrounded by an auburn cliff. There appeared to be a small tunnel on the cliff connecting it to the outside, and a lonely, barefooted male in lame pajamas standing at its entrance. There were no other living creatures. The entire area was covered with a tranquil green, and the air felt delicious. The sky was clear and lovely.

This was the entirety of the extremely useful information I'd gathered from my investigation. In the end, I still hadn't identified the reason why I was there, the cause, or any countermeasures…but I knew I had two choices.

One was, of course, to go through the tunnel and make it out on the other side. The other was to return to the magic circle and investigate the basin once more. The latter had a better chance of helping me understand my current situation. Also, because the inside of the tunnel was so dark that I couldn't make it out, it was unsettling. However, if we were going to talk unsettling, that magic circle was in a class all of its own. In fact, visually speaking, it broke the definition of unsettling.

In short, both options were bad.

What should I do…?

I only hesitated for a second. For the time being, I decided to return to the field with the magic circle.

I didn't make this choice for any particularly deep reason. What did you expect? This wasn't a major fork in the road. The difference between the two options was as short as the distance from your eyes to your nose.

The question was just which option I investigated first and which I postponed for later. Simply that. Just the order of events.

Or that was what it was supposed to be.

I turned on my heels and idly returned to the magic circle.

***

In the unfolding story, I will encounter countless critical crossroads that will alter fate. They will always appear suddenly and without warning. However, now that I look back on everything, the most important moment, the junction of fate…would have to be this one: the decision to not enter the tunnel and head back to the magic circle.

Merely that. I had no grand reason; I gave it no thought. And yet, it terrifies me to think that everything that occurs in the following pages began with this one decision.

The Wheel of Fate let out a grand creak before beginning to reverse.

Chapter 2:
Gate and Open Sesame

"WELL THEN, I came back and all, but…"

Once I left the cave entrance, I was back in the field with the magic circle. The profoundly *sinister* magic circle, carved upon blood-red stone, that currently sat at my feet.

It seemed the mysterious invisible wall from before had completely disappeared. Even though I stretched my hands out to the edge of the circle, I didn't feel any resistance; my hands sliced easily through the air.

However, upon further inspection, this magic circle stood out from its surroundings like a sore thumb. The meadow was calm and shaded by the tender green of the trees. It was peaceful. Notably, the flora didn't look like it had grown unattended. There were signs of wild growth—it hadn't been maintained for quite some

time—but I could tell human hands had been involved. My initial impression of a garden didn't seem that far off.

I glanced once more at the grass under my feet and noticed something new: a strange line extended out from the magic circle. The line was a shallow groove carved a few centimeters into the ground and painted with the same rusty paint as the magic circle. One end of the line was directly connected to the circle, which suggested that they were created together.

My eyes traced the line. It appeared to cut through the field and continue into the forest, going in the opposite direction from the tunnel.

Somehow, I was certain there was something waiting for me at the end.

***

My hunch hit a bullseye.

The rust-colored line extended from the magic circle and straight through the trees. After it exited the mini-forest, it continued until it collided with the surrounding cliff. In other words, the line was longer than I expected. At the end of that long, long line was a massive stone gate molded into the cliffside. The gate towered at over five meters tall, and its doors were tightly shut.

This extreme gate had an equally extreme magic circle-esque pattern carved into it. However, *this* magic circle didn't give off that sinister feeling. I only took a quick glance at it, but from what I could tell, it was made from a simple pattern of complex—but recognizable—geometric shapes. I didn't sense anything else. In fact, I thought it was a rather beautiful design.

Wait… Was it possible that the first magic circle was so visually horrid that my sense of beauty had been permanently altered?

In any case, the rust-red line appeared to pass underneath the sealed gate and continue inside. That meant if there was something at the end of the line, it was beyond the door.

"Well, this is a bit troublesome… It doesn't look like it was closed in the normal way…"

The gate had no keyhole or knob, only a magic circle. The grandiose majesty of its whole closed-ness kind of made it the Platonic ideal of a "sealed gate." But lacking gorilla-like strength that could surpass human limits, there was no way I could just bust through. I searched the area for a contraption meant to operate it, but not only did I not find one, I couldn't even find any clues. However, I figured that since it was a gate, it had to be possible to open.

To the point: Human means had to be sufficient to open and close this door. I didn't know the stone's weight, but judging by its size, it was definitely in the realm of tons.

Ah. Come to think of it, I heard that a set of gravestones can weigh around a ton. In that case, the weight of this absolutely massive stone gate would be… I dropped my shoulders, heartbroken.

Mentally exhausted, I peered at the magic circle carved into the stone door. Inevitably my mind turned back to that sinister magic circle in the field. "I wonder, could this gate be operated by some miraculous mystery power like magic…?"

Like, perhaps, the strange barrier I felt when I tried to leave that creepy circle.

There was a reason why I, who possessed a largely pragmatic and sensible mind, had in that moment allowed myself to hypothesize something as eccentric as magic. Whatever I had run into in the field was something totally outside the bounds of my experience, and resembled none of the phenomena I knew of, like static electricity, for instance.

Whatever the case might be, I currently had no means to deal with this gate. Utterly dejected, I announced to the empty air, "This is a completely hopeless situation. Should I go check out another area?" I gazed up at the mysterious magic circle. "If a magic chant could open this, I wouldn't be having so much trouble. *Open Sesame…!* Ha ha. Just kidding."

An odd creak split the air.

The first thing I felt was, if I had to put it into words, a strange discomfort. The moment I joked around and uttered "*Open Sesame*," it felt like the air—no, the entire surrounding atmosphere—faintly, and I mean really faintly, shuddered.

Next, there was a curious sensation of losing something very minuscule. Like a very small piece of a vast *something* left me. To put it in simple terms, it was like when you let out a fart.

Wait. I accidentally used a crude example. That was unlike me. I apologize.

More creaking sounds brought me back from my foolish thoughts. The source of the sounds was the center of the gate: the magic circle.

Huh. Could it be that the power from those words had actually somehow opened the gate for me? I looked up at the door, not expecting much. Since it was made of stone, I had to assume the creaking sounds were actually due to age.

My eyes widened at what unfolded next. The magic circle carved into the door glowed red…no, it *burned* red. Hot air spewed from the area around the circle, creating a heat haze. More precisely, by mere proximity, I was getting hot.

That wasn't all. The stone that comprised the gate began to twist and creak. The terrible sounds were born of a frightful pressure crushing the stone, continually twisting it inwards. Each time the strange pressure was about to warp the gate, the magic circle appeared to resist. It repeatedly flashed, each time accompanied by incandescent light and heat.

What was this? What exactly was happening? The sounds reaching my ears were no longer simple creaks. They resembled a spine being broken, and those broken bones were being chewed and devoured by *something*… It was almost like I was witnessing the gate's death throes. The entire stone gate was being devoured, and it was screaming.

A conspicuous crack split down the majestic magic circle. Torn, no longer able to resist, the circle gave in and the gate finally began to distort.

This scene felt straight out of hell.

Eh…? Wait a sec. Could all of this be happening because I said "Open Sesame"?

No, that couldn't be. Surely that wasn't the case. I was a sensible man of sensible conclusions. But timing-wise… No, no way. Yeah. That definitely wasn't it! It had to be some coincidence, some terrible simultaneous accident. That was final. I was decided.

Immediately after I settled on that assessment, the thing that was once a gate suddenly became midnight black and began to swell like a balloon. Then, the center where the magic circle had been located split into five pieces and peeled outwards. These pieces parted like the petals of a lily, black and crinkled after being burned.

Speaking of, why did it have to change color? It was really gross…

And thus, the stone gate guarding the cave was opened.

Chapter 3:
Mentos and Cola

THE STONE GATE twisted and ripped to form a giant lily. That ominous black color faded, and before I knew it, the door had returned to its original color.

Nevertheless, it was in quite the sorry state. While still unnerved by the gruesome scene, I peered into the cave through the center of the hole the "lily" had created.

"Guess I'll take a look around for a bit…"

Although it wasn't much of a feat, I'll be frank and say that entering such a suspicious hole was unbelievably scary. But I was certain the rust-red line I'd been following continued beyond it.

That mysterious invisible barrier released from the creepy magic circle in the field, and that mysterious rust-red line coming from it… I couldn't explain why, but everything about those things piqued my interest. My scorching curiosity won out over my fear.

The tunnel I had first discovered on the other side of the basin was only large enough for exactly one person to walk into. By comparison, the entrance left by the disemboweled stone gate was much bigger. The original height of the gate exceeded five meters. Even the hole in the center formed from the lily's petals was well over four meters.

Additionally, the sun was currently diagonally above this location and bathed the walls of the cave with direct light—quite unlike that dark, backlit tunnel. The inside of the cave also unexpectedly seemed to carry the light for some distance. Therefore, even without having any form of illumination on me, I would be able to properly explore the interior. In short, now was the perfect time to get nosy.

Gingerly stepping over the ruins of the door, I entered the cave.

The air inside was chilly. There was nothing near the entrance but for a long hallway that stretched further inside. The inner walls were made of sturdy stone that was clearly different from the auburn cliff outside. They were most likely fashioned from the same stone as the outside gate.

As I examined the walls, an impressive engraving caught my eye—a strange, elaborate pattern I had never seen before. It was increasingly clear that I had entered a space that was more akin to a ruin than a cave. I got the feeling this was a temple, or possibly a nobleman's tomb.

A tomb… Seriously? Please don't curse me.

Or rather, kind of importantly, was I still…in Japan?

The questions kept coming. If I thought rationally about it, I was pretty much tomb raiding… No, it was fine; it couldn't be helped. I had only followed the line from the magic circle in the field. There was nothing else I could do but search for more clues to understand my current situation.

But did I really have no choice? Hmm… As I started to lose confidence in the morality of my actions, I dropped my gaze back down to the rust-red line at my feet.

Right, the line! *It* was the one responsible for everything. It was the line!

Unlike the tunnel on the other side of the basin, this cave didn't appear to have a light at the end to signal an exit. That wasn't great. If this line continued too far, I would lose the light from the entrance.

"If I at least had my smartphone with me, I could use its light…" But as you might imagine, I had gone to bed in just my pajamas. The only things on my body were said lame pajamas and my underwear. "Well, if I had such a thing on me, I wouldn't have to investigate the insides of these ruins in the first place…"

Not only did I not have any means of contact, I also had no change of clothes or even the minimum amount of food supplies. Luckily, this place was rather warm. If I were still stuck here by nightfall, I didn't think I would have to worry about freezing to death in my pajamas. As for food, I'd spotted trees with edible-looking fruits scattered around the meadow. If I got peckish, I could just gnaw on one to satiate myself. To be frank, things looked pretty optimistic to me.

Since the tunnel from before most likely connected to the outside, I could even pass through there, leave the basin, and find a nearby house. And once I reached that house, I could call the police or my family and leave the rest to them.

Family…

As I followed that line of thought, that word popped into my head and I felt an ache. No, it wasn't painful, exactly. It felt more like a sharp sense of discomfort. What was this discomfort? I didn't really understand it…

That troublesome thought stewed in the corner of my mind as I continued to silently follow the line.

The stone corridor felt cold and icy. Just when I thought it would only get darker from there on, the ruin was filled with light.

"Wha—?" This surprise made me look around in a panic. The light cleanly illuminated my surroundings. I unconsciously gasped. "This is amazing…"

It felt like when an overseas exhibit of ancient ruins is suddenly lit up. The illumination highlighted the splendor of the carvings. The symmetric beauty of the thick stone was so impressive that I wished I had a camera with me.

A vast hall opened up farther down the hallway. The rust-red line continued straight ahead into the interior. When I looked up, I noted a portion of the engravings on the ceiling were faintly glowing. So that was the light source. They didn't look like fluorescent lights or LEDs, so their mechanics were a complete mystery to me.

"Is someone there…?" I timidly called as I headed farther in.

No answer.

“Is there a sensor or something? For somewhere that looks abandoned, this place is quite high tech…”

What exactly was going on with this place? Upon a second inspection in the better lighting, the structure itself didn’t feel old, outside of its design. To be clear, the condition of the architecture was solid, even clean.

My eyes wandered as I continued to walk through the hall. I soon arrived at the circular chamber at the end. It was rather wide. From the looks of it, it was as wide as the field I woke up in. The rust-red line at my feet continued to proceed to its center. In fact, the line connected to an equally rusty magic circle drawn on the ground ahead of me.

I see… In other words, this strange line connects the magic circle in the field to this one inside the ruins.

I had, like a genius, unmasked the endpoint of the line. However, there was a problem.

“What the heck is this…?! Give me a break already…”

As I grasped what I was looking at, the blood drained from my face. At the same time, the corner of my mouth unintentionally pulled up to form a half-smile.

On top of this magic circle at the end of the hallway stood an imposing chair. Someone was sitting in it. Despite this, there was still no sign of life in this place. Yup, the sitting person was dead.

A skeleton.

It had been years, at least, since life left the body seated on that chair. It was swathed in expensive robes, but seeing as it was just bones, I couldn’t tell the owner’s age. However, despite its seated position, the body was clearly tall. Probably male, then. He was likely someone of high standing as well, given the cascade of jeweled rings on his fingers.

But more than the rings, my attention was fixed on the outrageous cane gripped in the skeleton’s hand. Some of the jewels embedded in the cane were similar to the ones on the rings, but a number of these strange crystals were the size of a battery, and actually, there was a ridiculous quantity of those. Most seemed to be gathered at the head.

Now that would definitely ring up a high price.

No, no, no. Don’t get me wrong. I wasn’t the tomb raiding type. I didn’t have even the slightest desire to steal it. I faced the skeleton and quickly clapped my hands together. “I am just an unlucky victim. I will never rob your grave…”

Please, do not haunt me. I beg you. I beg you.

I desperately made excuses to Old Man Bones (my nickname for him), whom I believed to be the owner of these ruins.

In any case, his corpse had skeletonized quite tidily. The insides were clean, so that was visually a salvation. I was thankful that at least this wasn’t going to be the day I encountered a gruesome half-mummified corpse in a gloomy cavern.

“Well then…I can’t stay like this forever.”

After I finished my prayer, I slowly raised my head. While it was shocking to encounter a skeleton, I’m well-known for my ability to quickly change gears.

I shifted my gaze to the magic circle on the floor. “So…the sinister magic circle in the field is connected to this.”

I checked for any other sign of connection between this magic circle and that one. On inspection, the designs were similar. This magic circle, however, had less intricate patterns compared to the one in the field. Also, the one I started on was comprised of minute patterns packed densely together, but the spaces between the patterns in this one were large enough to discern.

If you were to ask me which was the main circle, it would have to be the one I was standing on in the beginning. Old Man Bones’ magic circle felt like the secondary.

“Still, I’m not exactly in the magic circle fandom… With just this to go on, I still don’t really…hm?”

At that moment, I noticed the huge stone pedestal diagonally in front of Old Man Bones. There appeared to be something placed on top of it.

“Is that…a stone…book?”

On top of the pedestal were several stone slates bound together to form a kind of book. It was a sophisticated piece of craftsmanship. Unlike a paper book, it would probably last for thousands of years, though it also looked heavy and hard to read.

But since it was in the shape of a book, I just had to open the cover to read its contents. However, it was sealed with a tough, stone binding of sorts, which also affixed it firmly to the stone pedestal. I also couldn’t help but notice the strange pattern carved into the binding.

Right, of course. It was yet another magic circle. I was getting used to this kind of pattern. At this rate, in the near future I could even become a magic circle sommelier.

This circle wasn’t of the sinister variety, but rather the geometric one —the same type as the one carved into the entrance of the ruins, which I had just released. A callback to the same type of magic circle. In that case…

“A chant could release the seal, right?”

To tell you the truth, I didn’t want to play this hand. If I succeeded, it would confirm that the true culprit behind the Case of the Barbaric Obliteration of the Stone Gate was me. On the other hand, if I purposefully tried to do it and it failed, I’d have run out of options and might start to despair.

But…

“I have no choice.” I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. When I opened my eyes, I spoke these words: “*Open…Sesame*.”

It happened again, and in almost exactly the same way it had the last time I chanted those words.

The binding sealing the book rapidly turned pitch black. In the next instant, it inflated like a balloon before exploding like a Mentos thrown into a bottle of cola, shooting up to the ceiling in a wild burst.

"Wha…oh? Whoaaaa!"

Countless black splinters ricocheted back down. The vibration from the explosion shook my eardrums. I was so terrified by the sudden onslaught of splinters and savage sound that I lost my balance and fell back, landing flat on my butt.

From that position, I stared up to find a shard of the stone binding lodged right into that literally rock-solid ceiling.

"I-Isn't that a bit overboard…?!"

You gotta be kidding me! I thought my back was gonna give out!

But really, how could this be happening? Considering the evidence, I had to conclude that I had mastered the invincible destructive spell *Open Sesame*. Simultaneously, the case was closed. The true dastardly criminal behind the terrorist incident that destroyed the stone gate had been identified: yours truly.

I managed to gather myself before standing up and rubbing my butt.

Tentatively, I turned my attention to the stone book. Even though the binding was on the cover and it had exploded in such a grandiose manner, the book was unscathed. Even the stone pedestal beneath the book was untouched.

Come to think of it, the area around the entrance wasn't the least bit damaged when I destroyed the gate. *Open Sesame* was quite efficient, wasn't it? Though its modus operandi was in the worst taste.

With the binding blown off, the characters inscribed on the stone book's cover were exposed.

Ack, what the heck? It was in a language I didn't recognize. It was nothing like Japanese, and it was different from the Latin alphabet and Arabic script too. I gave up. Maybe it was an ancient language?

Despite all I'd done, all the crimes I'd committed—destruction of property (the entrance) + trespass (of ruins) + destruction of artifacts (via Mentos Geyser)—I couldn't understand a single one of these characters… Wasn't that a little unfair after coming so far?

My heart hurt from the guilt. I dropped my teary eyes to the stone book's cover and stared hopelessly at the mystery language.

Summoning the Sorcerer King and the Final Theory of the Destruction of the World in Two Thousand Years

Eh…? What was this? The meaning behind the string of characters flowed into my head like water. Why was this happening? I could read. I could really read it…

I timidly turned the page and began to consume the book's contents. Lines of characters were carved into the smooth surface. The first row read: "At the end of my life, I shall inscribe the ultimate summoning spell here. — Luvel Zairein"

I still really didn't recognize the characters, but I could read them just like I could Japanese.

I see. It appears the author of this book is Mr. Luvel Zairein. Hmph, probably a foreigner.

I continued to move my eyes across the page.

"You, who opened this book that sleeps beside my corpse: Should a living soul set foot inside this stone chamber, it can only mean that a thousand years have passed since the spell *Summon the Sorcerer King of Destruction* destroyed the old world. The timer mechanism sealing the Grand Stone Gate has been released."

My corpse… That would mean Old Man Bones over there was the author, Mr. Luvel Zairein. In that case, was this book a kind of personal testament?

Also, when I read the words "Grand Stone Gate," the image of the stone gate at the entrance popped into my mind. He couldn't possibly be referring to that, could he? And while I didn't understand what he meant with that "timer mechanism" bit, said Grand Stone Gate had turned into a sloppy grotesque mess after the initial *Open Sesame* incident. *O-Old Man Bones, I'm so sorry for betraying your expectations…*

"But I wonder who this 'Sorcerer King of Destruction' is…?"

The book's title also contained the words "Sorcerer King." It sounded like an important topic for the author, so I kept reading: "The Sorcerer King of Destruction is a crazed king from another world called to bring ruin to this one. Here I shall establish and execute the summoning theory I have spent my life researching."

Hey, wait a sec! Didn't this "Sorcerer King of Destruction" sound like a super bad guy?

Old Man Bones, why were you summoning such a person?! You an idiot? You wanna die? Ah, right. You're dead…

While I was irritated by Old Man Bones' reckless pronouncements, I turned the page.

"The being known as the Sorcerer King is born into an age via the selection and summoning of a human being from another world who possesses a destructive will. There is no doubt that many of the summoned Sorcerer Kings recorded in history have arrived from another world in this manner."

Th-there were actually people summoned as Sorcerer Kings in the past? What a bunch of lowlifes. Who had that much free time?

"However, this criteria alone was insufficient. The many Sorcerer Kings, who each failed to destroy this world and were killed, were summoned with only their destructive personality in mind. Only a small handful of them had the disposition to utilize sorcery."

Ahh. So, the Sorcerer Kings were defeated. Well, yeah. I mean, the world didn't seem very destroyed to me.

“However, the groundbreaking innovation of my own summoning spell is the two-stage birthing process. With this, the risk of summoning an inadequate Sorcerer King has been completely eliminated.”

A two-stage birthing process, huh? Hmm…what did that mean? To tell you the truth, I was enjoying reading this. I had always been a bookworm. Besides, I got a kick out of learning about all the many varied steps that went into devising complicated things.

From here, the book got to the real meat of the story. At that point, I was still completely mistaken about the true intentions of the man known as Luvel Zairein and the reason why I was even in his tomb.

That is, until my eyes fell upon this passage: “First, in this basin isolated by a barrier and topography, I shall summon the human from another world who will serve as the ‘vessel’ for the Sorcerer King of Destruction. This ‘vessel’ has been chosen based solely on the aggregate amount of mana in its possession. That is to say, it will be a powerful denizen of another world who lacks the destructive will necessary to become the Sorcerer King. However, with the additional elements I have woven into the spell prior to summoning, the ‘vessel’ will be compelled by intense suggestions to pass through the ‘Cave of Beginnings and Ends.’”

Hm? What was this? Wait…“Cave of Beginnings and Ends”…? Intense suggestions…to pass through the cave?

Cold sweat dripped down my back. I had a vivid flashback to the moment when I woke in the basin, and to that suspicious tunnel, and to the profound, incomprehensible urge I felt when I saw the cave in the auburn cliff face.

No way. But then again: “Unaware of its circumstances, the summoned ‘vessel’ will be shepherded by these simple impulses to enter the ‘Cave of Beginnings and Ends.’ Upon the walls of that cave has been carved the elaborate spell of my design: *Soul Transcription*.”

Huh? *Soul Transcription*? What was that…? There was something like that set up in that tunnel?

“I crafted the spell *Soul Transcription* to annihilate the memories and wipe the personality of the unstable ‘vessel,’ since its soul will be yet loosely tethered immediately after the summoning. Then, a destructive personality forged from my own memories shall be transcribed onto its body and soul, overwriting its ego. When it exits the ‘Cave of Beginnings and Ends’ and descends to the outside world, it will no longer be the ‘vessel.’ *He* will be the true reincarnation of the Sorcerer King of Destruction.”

……

“That is how he shall be born. Possessing both the ultimate mana reservoir and pure destructive will, he shall be history’s strongest Sorcerer King!”

“What the hell?!” I screamed at Zairein’s old bones.

I was in a ton of danger, wasn’t I?! If I had nonchalantly entered that tunnel, what would have happened to me?! That was horrifying!

You've gotta be kidding me! Think of the trouble you're causing others, Zairein! Why don't you just die?! Ah, right. You're dead…

"So…this is another world, and I'm the Sorcerer King of Destruction?"

Now that I'd said that, the gross magic used to utterly destroy the Grand Stone Gate did seem fitting for a Great Demon King. As for the Mentos Geyser that became of the stone book binding… Well, rather than the work of a Great Demon King, it had felt more like a street performer's trick.

***

"The information stops here, huh…?"

I slowly closed the book. The thin, bound slates fell closed with a thud.

This was how the testament of Luvel Zairein ended: "To my kind and noble beloved. This shall be my revenge upon our world. Even if this world will eventually be undone by the powers of its predetermined destiny, I must bring forth its destruction with my own hands."

The last part wasn't especially clear. I think that "beloved" referred to Luvel Zairein's deceased fiancée. That had been revealed earlier in the book. This unnamed fiancée met her untimely end after getting involved in a terrible political dispute when Zairein was young. Apparently, this tragedy triggered his decision to destroy the world.

Also, another important fact had come to light. It appeared that to activate the spell known as *Summon the Sorcerer King*, the caster was required to sacrifice their own life. In other words, the person who summoned the Sorcerer King would always die afterward. This also appeared to be the cause of Luvel Zairein's death and his transition into Old Man Bones. In short, this man had exchanged his life to summon me into this world.

What a ridiculous story. Even though I was the kidnapped victim here, for some reason, it felt like I had indirectly killed Zairein. It left a super bad aftertaste in my mouth.

Hey, you really are ridiculous, Old Man Bones…

There were a few other unsettling descriptions in the book. One was on how to complete the spell using a being possessing the "primordial ancestor's blood" as the "galvanizing sacrifice." I wondered who this "primordial ancestor" was and what a "galvanizing sacrifice" meant. I didn't understand the contextual details. The problem was, this suggested someone else had been unwillingly sacrificed to summon the Sorcerer King.

To tell you the truth, when I learned this, I wanted to send Luvel Zairein's bony corpse flying through the air with a kick. But it was pointless, seeing as the man had already died and turned into dry, old, ex-human rocks. That would literally be kicking the dead. And, as might be expected, that was a little too much to entertain for someone like me who took great pride in his cultured gentleman's soul.

I resisted the urge to murder and thereby violate my chivalrous code.

Once I finished the book, I left the cave. By the time I exited, the sun had already set and my surroundings were dim. I hadn't noticed because of the lighting in the cave, but I had spent quite some time immersed in reading.

Just when I was about to gaze up at the night sky, my stomach growled. With everything that had happened, I hadn't felt the twinge until now. Thinking back, it was clear why I was hungry. Between falling asleep the previous night and that very moment, I hadn't eaten anything for a whole day. Apparently even the Sorcerer King, destroyer of the world, could get hungry.

"Well…that's to be expected. I'm just a normal human…"

However, the fact that I had been summoned to be an evil king in another world by the hand of an evil magician still didn't feel real. Which is to say, all the facts presented in the book coincided exactly with everything I had experienced so far—indeed, I felt like its claims were harder to deny—but for some reason, I just couldn't believe it. Why…?

"Ah! Right." I figured it out. I still hadn't found any *proof* that this was another world. While it was true that I was in terra incognita, that was it. Claiming this place wasn't on planet Earth just because I didn't recognize it was too far a leap of logic.

Granted, I had confirmed the existence of magic in this place. But that couldn't be proof in itself that this was another world, since, I mean, people still weren't sure if magic existed on Earth.

All right, in any case, I would investigate the next day to see if this truly was another world. All further actions and plans would be determined after that.

Just you watch, stupid Zairein.

I wouldn't just believe it because he told me to. Being summoned to another world was the stuff of an unscientific fairy tale.

With that resolution in mind, I finally turned my eyes up to the starry night sky. There, I saw *two* beautiful, shining moons.

……

Okay, okay, I get it.

And that was how I came to fully accept that I had been summoned to another world.

Chapter 4:
Apple and Hideout

"WELL THEN. What should I do now…?"

The morning light filtered through the trees. As I gnawed on an apple-like fruit, I sat down on the veranda of a dilapidated home nestled in the green. This small, one-story home was practically buried in the overgrown flora surrounding it. Ivy blanketed the rotting walls, and grass grew wild on the roof.

If I ignored the clear signs of deterioration, it was a fine house. I discovered it when I went looking for fruit the previous night. It looked to have been abandoned for quite a long time, so as expected, there were no signs of human life.

I couldn't help but wonder when a living person had last been in the basin. Various elements of the area appeared to have been planned, from the fine lawn hidden

under the tangled weeds to the selection of edible fruit trees. However, nothing was maintained.

Most prominently, the corpse of the summoner I discovered the previous day had already turned into a skeleton. I didn't think too deeply about it when I found it; I'd just figured that the repercussion for summoning was having your soul sucked out of your body and your corpse immediately withered into bones.

However…I no longer considered that to be the case. Now that I'd had time to think and observe, I felt certain there had been a time lag between the point when Zairein activated the summoning spell and died and when I was actually summoned. Furthermore, I doubted it could have been simply one or two years…

In any case, I was lucky to find shelter and a food supply in the basin's fruit trees. Also, this fruit from another world that I was so busy chewing was super delicious. It was roughly the size of an apple, but the amazingly fresh, elegant, sweet-and-sour flavor was reminiscent of a cranberry. It seemed nutritious enough, so I'd probably be using it as my main food source in the meantime.

But, of course, I couldn't stay cooped up in the basin forever. There was a limit to my supply of cranberry-apples (my name for them).

But, then again…

"I can't just go through that tunnel to get outside…"

Therein lay the problem. The only connection to the outside world, that tunnel—I believe it was called the "Cave of Beginnings and Ends"—had that terrifying spell *Soul Transcription* inscribed within it. If I passed through it, I would be killed and possessed by Luvel Zairein, giving birth to the crazed Sorcerer King of Destruction.

Roughly a day had passed since my summoning. According to the stone book, an unstable soul was required for *Soul Transcription* to activate, so there was a possibility it was now safe for me to pass through that tunnel. However, to actually make that attempt would be literally gambling with my life. It really would be best to consider the tunnel an escape of last resort. In that case, the only other option I could think of was daunting, to say the least.

"I guess I'll have to find out how to get over the surrounding cliff." I looked up from the veranda at the auburn cliff towering over the trees. The cliff's incline looked to be completely vertical. Additionally, there didn't seem to be any place on it that could serve as a foothold. "It's totally a wall…"

As I let out a deep sigh, I turned my eyes back to the dilapidated house. Its structure gave off the impression of a simple abode in a foreign countryside. However, on closer inspection, I found the architecture was quite different from any I knew of in my original world. The interior of the building was modest, furnished with the bare minimum. Nevertheless, I spotted several pieces of furniture whose purpose I couldn't grasp, once again hammering home the message that I was in another world.

The previous night I slept near the entrance, but since the sun had already set at that time, I didn't get a proper look inside.

"All right, let's explore a little."

For the time being, I couldn't think of anything else to do.

The rooms inside the building were much better illuminated than they seemed from the exterior. The reason for this brightness was the windows, which had glass panes.

It suddenly occurred to me to wonder how technologically advanced this world might be. At the very least, they had the know-how to fashion glass panes for their homes. Then again, was I really looking at glass? For some reason, the transparency seemed low.

Several other rooms awaited me further within. As I investigated them, I discovered a sturdy wooden door.

"Even though the front didn't have a door, the interior has this fine-looking one… I have nothing to say about this cultural quirk."

After I so easily infiltrated the building the previous night, I had the feeling the whole place had been designed under the auspice of "freedom of movement." In support of this theory, the entrance had been left without a door in a way that felt purposeful. Furthermore, the structure of the veranda was open to any wandering visitors. From what I could tell, the only room in the entire house that had a door was this one.

I placed my hand on top of something that resembled a doorknob. For a moment, I felt some kind of resistance, but the door opened easily enough.

"This is…"

It was a library. One side had bookshelves absolutely packed with written material. Magnificent! When I scanned the room, I landed on the

fine writing desk at the back. Perhaps not a library, then, but something more like a study?

My eyes ran across the titles of the books lining the wall.

Complete Work of Spells, Analysis of Time Spells, Research on Advanced Summoning Spells, etc.

Amazing. It seemed like every book specialized in magic. On the other hand, there were other eye-catching titles…

Forbidden Spell of the Dead, Blood Sacrifice, Ancient Spells to Summon Evil Gods, etc.

The ludicrous words in these titles had me transfixed.

"Ah, I see now…"

Conclusion: This room belonged to that bastard, Luvel Zairein.

Which meant that, in all likelihood, this dilapidated home was Zairein's hideout. Come to think of it, that man used the entire basin as a grand stage for his creepy plan and even staked his life on his summoning spell. The preparations alone must have required a substantial amount of time. I should have realized sooner that he would have needed a base of sorts within the basin.

A thick mess of papers with blueprints of magic circles covered the desk in front of me. I took a quick look through them. Nope, couldn't understand a lick of it.

Next, I grabbed several books off the shelves and flipped through them. The regular old paper books were nicely preserved. No…their condition was, in fact, *too* good. Considering the decay on the exterior of the building, the interior was miraculously well-preserved, although there were still a few damaged areas inside. Yet this study didn't show any signs of age. Why was it so unnaturally pristine compared to everything else in the basin? It was almost as if time had stopped within the room…

However, that didn't truly matter to me at the moment because I had a bigger problem.

"Wh-what is this? I can't even read it…"

I couldn't understand a single character in the book. It was probably a concrete explanation of magic, but I could only see it as a line of, uh, lines. Simply put, it looked like it said: "kese pepepe pora nipipupu…&&."

The content of this tome was probably a little difficult.

But why was this happening? I had been able to read the stone book so easily. From what I could remember, the characters in these books were of the same type. Was my suddenly awakened translation ability acting up?

My head swam. I staggered and my shoulder hit several books, causing them to fall onto the floor with a thud. The fall flipped the books open, revealing their contents. When I glanced down, I noticed something odd.

"Huh? This one's perfectly legible…"

I picked up the book and examined the title.

Introduction to Spellcrafting I

***

About one hour later, I went out to the garden with the book in hand. I could read this *Introduction to Spellcrafting I* with relative ease. To be clear, I think it was because the book was aimed at elementary-school children. I was glad I could understand it, yet I also felt oddly conflicted…

I had excavated all twelve volumes of the *Introduction to Spellcrafting* series from the study. The authors were listed as "Spellcaster Luvel Zairein / Spellcaster Emerly Heilem." The two names made me suspect the series was a collaboration.

Well, it was to be expected that a section of Zairein's own works would be mixed in with the thick research books on the rest of his shelves. Yet the subject matter of this *Introduction to Spellcrafting* series made them stand out from the others even beyond their authorship.

The study's collection included a number of advanced books also written by Zairein. But as expected, through some error in my ability, I was unable to read them. I *could* figure out—if barely—the titles, as well as short biographies about the author. That was how I learned Zairein held the title of "Imperial Master Spellcaster" and had taught as a professor at a university for that same art.

So he was an accomplished elite in the spellcaster world… Yet he also wanted to destroy the world from the bottom of his soul. *A provoked elite can be a truly terrifying thing.*

Anyway, I had been calling these strange phenomena "magic," "miracle mystery power," and such. However, since the official name for it in this world was "spellcraft," I decided to abide by this world's standards and address it as such.

Now then, I had gone out to the garden to test a matter described in *Introduction to Spellcrafting I*. Specifically, I couldn't start casting or crafting any spells until I first performed a certain rite, the purpose of which was "to discern my attributes."

This world's magic…no, *spells*, right? This world's spells came in variations known as attributes, like Fire and Water. Each attribute's base "mana conversion rate" also varied. Conversion rate referred to the amount of mana a given spellcaster required to cast a given spell, which meant that the strongest spells were only really accessible to those with efficient conversion. Conversely, if a spellcaster's conversion rate was low, they could only use wimpy spells no matter how much mana they channeled into them. In other words, degree of talent was determined at birth.

Then again, a person's aggregate amount of mana was also a huge factor, so talent wasn't solely reliant on this natural conversion rate. It also meant that a person's aptitude varied by both attribute and aggregate mana. Therefore, I first had to "discern my attributes" to see which attributes I had aptitude in—i.e., which had the best conversion rate for me—at which point I could expand my expertise within that attribute. That appeared to be the basic learning process of spells.

However, I'd also read something that made me uneasy. It seemed that there were people who couldn't cast or craft spells at all. Though even with that knowledge haunting me, I had already used something that could be called a spell. I destroyed a gate and a book's binding with that power. That was why I knew there was no way I could be one of those people. *But then again… Now that I think about it, I wonder what attribute that was. Grotesque attribute?*

Also, point of order, I was the Sorcerer King of Destruction from another world. A job class like "Sorcerer King" was supposed to use spells, right?

My unease didn't quite dissipate, but it was time to find out my aptitude with the attributes.

Right, first I think I'll test my aptitude for the Fire attribute. Fire spells would be super beneficial. I probably wouldn't have to start a fire from scratch. Above all else, Fire spells were cool.

I ran a tree branch through the dirt to carefully draw the spell circle shown in the introductory book. Ah, right. I'd been saying "magic circle" this whole time, but according to this world's standards, it had to be called a "spell circle."

So confusing. Seriously, why…? Jeez, someone should've told me earlier. Okay. Focus. First, draw a circle, and, uhh, draw a line here…

This magic circle—I mean spell circle—would allow even an amateur like myself to cast simple spells by supplementing my mana. Hmph. I had read the explanation, but I couldn't fully wrap my head around it. I think it was similar to training wheels on a bike?

The circle had a comparatively simple design. I copied it while looking at the example, so I was sure I didn't make a mistake. Also, as this was an introductory book, it said that it was all right if the design came out a little rough.

Okay, now to focus my mind… The construction of the image was important. Imagine creating a spark—

I chanted: "*Ignite*!"

But nothing happened.

Huh? That's strange. I tilted my head as I carefully redrew the spell circle. *This should be good now.*

I once again focused my mind and chanted: "*Ignite*!"

……

Nothing happened.

"Ignite!"

"Ig-ni-tuh!"

……

Welp, it appeared that I had no aptitude for the Fire attribute. What a somber way to get the news…

All right, on to the next. I would try out the Ice attribute. It would be refreshing during the summer. A cool attribute fit for cool and collected me.

Okay, concentrate… Imagine the moisture in the atmosphere freezing —

“Frost!”

……

Nothing happened again.

“Frost!”

“Frooost!”

“F-R-O-S-T!”

Nothing happened…again.

A sneaking suspicion that I had drawn the spell circle wrong bubbled in the back of my mind. With the introductory book in hand, I carefully, carefully began to redraw…

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Before I realized it, the sun had begun to set. I was completely exhausted, standing in front of dozens upon dozens of spell circles strewn about the garden. Since I began, I had redrawn the spell circle over and over again, trying to cast spells with the Lightning attribute, Wind attribute, and Fire attribute (I couldn’t give it up).

Each time the spell failed, I redrew the spell circle. That was why I had taken so much time to do so much nothing. However, I was now basically a master of spell circles. I could probably draw a transcendentally beautiful spell circle with my eyes closed.

After all of this, a new suspicion was growing inside of me. Could it be that it wasn’t my lack of talent that was at fault, but rather the author, that bastard Luvel Zairein?

A real possibility! It was true that he possessed a dazzling résumé and was some outstanding professor according to his books. However, we were talking about the incompetent Old Man Bones here. He destroyed himself for the sake of summoning the Sorcerer King of Destruction. It wouldn’t be the weirdest thing in the world if this was a useless book written by a useless dummy.

Hmph. No doubt about it. Yup, I am totally convinced as of…right now. With that conclusion, I decided to test the last attribute before grabbing some fruit to eat. I had been so engrossed in drawing spell circles that I forgot to eat lunch.

I sloppily flipped through the pages of the book. “All that’s left to test is…the Earth attribute.”

Earth, huh? Well, it was a pretty bland attribute. Even if I couldn’t use it, it wouldn’t really damage my heart as much as the others had. I had to keep reminding myself that none of this was due to my lack of talent. It was all that damn Zairein’s fault. There was no way I had no talent… No way… no talent…

Since it was getting annoying redrawing those circles, I stood on top of one of the spell circles that I’d already made and looked over the introductory book in my hand.

Uhhh, let's see… Imagine packing grains of sand together to the size of my fingertip.

"Create Pebble…"

Instantaneously and with a dreadful roar, the ground in front of me trembled and rose, driving forth a shockwave. Still thundering, the ground bubbled upwards. The surrounding trees were uprooted by the pressure of the riotous earth. They fell one after another like dominoes. It looked like the end of the world.

"Wh-whoooooaaa!" Unable to comprehend what was happening, I screamed in terror.

The risen earth disintegrated, dispersed, and whirled like a tornado. The turbulent spinning began to congeal into a mass that grew and grew while rattling eerily. From the corner of my eye, I saw that all the shaking had caused a portion of the hideout's roof to collapse.

When everything finally settled, an enormous boulder with a diameter of dozens of meters stood in front of me, and the surrounding area was ravaged beyond belief.

I wasn't sure exactly how long the boulder took to form, but my internal clock told me that I had just experienced several minutes of pure horror.

I know this might sound pathetic, but my legs had almost given out… And it appeared that I had an aptitude for the Earth attribute.

Chapter 5:
Textbook and Veranda

"I'VE READ QUITE A BIT of this book already…"

I lounged on the veranda of the hideout surrounded by green, idly flipping the pages of *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV*.

I gazed up at the crumbling roof. Tiny white flowers grew in the grass covering the roof and fluttered in the wind. *How beautiful. I wonder what the name of those flowers is.*

With the sun shining, the veranda was nice and warm, so I read comfortably. Due to my accidental misfire of *Create Pebble* the previous night, the trees out front were knocked down. As a result, the sunlight on the veranda, which had already been good, became even better.

That giant pebble (though I was a bit hesitant to call that hulking boulder a "pebble") had, for some reason, crumbled away right after its creation. It appeared that for Earth spells, a creation's form couldn't be maintained unless mana was constantly imbued into it. As such, I was saved a bunch of time dealing with the mess. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that a stupidly big rock rolling around the garden would've been a nuisance.

The fundamental tenet of Earth spells was: "Once the supply of mana is cut by the spellcaster, the creation shall crumble," which made Earth spells difficult to rely on—the instability was a real disadvantage. Since all things created by the Earth attribute would inevitably crumble, its spells couldn't be used in civil engineering or construction.

Still, there were Earth spells a spellcaster could use to create weapons and tools from dirt. Unfortunately, without a constant supply of mana, the object would lose its form, giving the attribute awful mileage. To put it bluntly, as long as there wasn't a specific reason for an earthen weapon, it would be way easier to use the normal kind. *Instead of swinging around a dirt sword as it guzzles up my mana, I think I'll be better off buying a regular one and using that.*

In the end, the practicality of Earth spells was limited, and in daily use they were seen as having more cons than pros.

Hmph, to think that the only attribute I had an aptitude for was viewed in such a way by society…

The author of *Introduction to Spellcrafting*, Luvel Zairein, also looked down on and criticized the Earth attribute in his works. It really was a struggle to hold back my urge to kill him. You could even see the discrimination in the size of the volumes. The number of pages for the volume on the Earth attribute was a fifth of the ones about Fire or Wind.

The *Introduction to Spellcrafting* series consisted of twelve volumes. Volume I described the general aspects of spellcrafting (such as "discerning attributes"), and the remaining volumes were dedicated to explaining their respective attributes. The bare minimum of what I needed to read was

Volume I and the one associated with the Earth attribute: Volume IV. Even if I did read the others, I wouldn't be able to use their spells.

The book explaining the Earth attribute, *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV*, was super light. I mean like "light novel" light. Incidentally, *Introduction to Spellcrafting II* on the Fire attribute was as thick as a law school textbook.

Hey! Isn't this blatant discrimination based on inborn ability?! Don't mess with me. I'll kill you, Zairein! Ah, right. You're dead…

In any case, I diligently read *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV*. While reading, I realized the writing style of *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV* felt a bit different from Volume I and the stone book written by Zairein.

How could I describe it? Like the wording felt sort of…gentle? Come to think of it, could this volume have been mainly composed by the co-author, Emerly Heilem? To tell you the truth, just imagining that made my motivation to study take a sudden turn.

Yeah, that's right. My teacher is Emerly-sensei. It absolutely isn't that bastard, Zairein. Yeah, that definitely has to be the case. All right. I just decided that's definitely the truth.

Decision made, I returned to my studies with renewed fervor. In the meantime, to maintain this level of motivation, I imagined Emerly-sensei as my type: a gentle woman, slightly older than me, and a bookworm. How wonderful.

Ah, of course, I knew Emerly-sensei's actual gender hadn't been revealed. And even if they were still alive, I was sure they would have lived quite a long life by now…

……

But, you know, ladies and gentlemen, motivation is important.

Well then, unlike the first volume, which was a general introduction to spellcrafting, *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV* contained a rather in-depth explanation of spells. As such, if I became lazy with my reading, portions turned into those illegible scribbles that looked like "Nyu popo reperepere uhoho…@♪♪."

It was truly painful. Each time this happened, I felt like I had been reincarnated as a gorilla or a Neanderthal. However, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. As I managed to skillfully avoid the gorillafication of my translation ability and properly read the book, I began to realize something new.

Although the true nature of the bug in my translation ability was yet unclear, I was fairly sure I now had a vague understanding of what caused it. In summary, my ability to read this mysterious language as soon as I awoke in this world didn't allow me to 1) decipher the particular elements in spells or 2) read the contents of spell circles. If I were to compare it to words and numbers, it would be like seeing a mathematical equation as a mere collection of characters unless you actually possessed the knowledge to understand it.

Furthermore, reading advanced text on spellcrafting and deciphering spell circles required understanding extremely specialized grammar and terminology. In other words, expertise. As such, I think it would be best to imagine my situation as akin to that of a freshman entering their university's law department and falling into despair after having just read judgments given by the Supreme Court during the Meiji Era.

Oh, come on… What exactly is up with this half-baked translation ability?! I couldn't help but feel that there was definitely something else going on with it.

"Well, in any case, I guess I just have to take my self-study seriously."

I really had no choice but to face this head-on. I was a man who wouldn't be discouraged.

Please watch me, Emerly-sensei. I'll show you that I can overcome this.

Although I said that, I spent nearly two days lounging around on the veranda reading this book. I hadn't done any experiments or run any tests since casting *Create Pebble*.

Who could blame me? I had wanted to create a simple pebble the size of the tip of my pinky, yet I got that disaster instead. The destructive environmental terrorist attack the day before had completely traumatized me.

***

While sprawled out on the veranda, I flipped through the introductory book. If I withstood discouragement due to the frequent gorillafication of my translation ability, I was making decent progress, if I do say so myself. Yeah, I wanted to pat myself on the back.

As such, I had managed to make it roughly halfway through *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV*. I reached a new chapter.

That day…I encountered a spell that drastically changed my destiny. Was it grace from a benevolent goddess? Or a curse from a genocidal witch?

At the time, I was yet ignorant.

"Uh, let's see…*Create Golem*?"

Chapter 6:
Call and Response

GOLEMS. Conjured Earth soldiers. Powerful yet silent servants with absolute loyalty toward their creator. Furthermore, they lent a consistent advantage in spellcaster vs. spellcaster battles, so they were even implemented by national armies.

Frankly, golems were the sole reason why, among the twelve attributes, the scum-level Earth attribute made it into the ranks of the "Four Cornerstone Attributes of Spellcrafting." If the Earth attribute somehow lost the ability to create golems, no one would bat an eye when it got dragged off its throne.

Notably, this creation spell also deviated from the fundamental tenet of the Earth attribute—its creations lasted. As such, it was considered abnormally overpowered compared to the other Earth spells. It was, in fact, a spell from the ruins of the old world.

In *Introduction to Spellcrafting I*, the author Luvel Zairein had this to say about golems: "They are valuable."

For this man to say such an uncomplicatedly positive thing about the Earth attribute, golems really had to be *extremely* valuable. Still…kind of a backhanded compliment, all things considered.

In any case, in *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV*, well over half the content was dedicated to explaining the spell *Create Golem*.

As Earth spells were treated like trash by Zairein, if I had to describe the thickness of *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV*, it would be "*super* thin." I know I've already expressed this disappointment, but please understand that without this chapter on *Create Golem*, the book would be so thin that it would blend right in with the light novels in Comiket.

"All right, let's make a golem!" I made that snap decision despite my lingering fear of the atrocities I had committed every time I'd cast a spell.

Of course there was no way I could resist the temptation, having seen the value a golem could produce. But there was something else that drew my interest.

"Silent servants who follow the commands of the spellcaster."

Isn't that just like a pet dog? I want one…

I was starved for socialization, so I was reaching my limit. This wasn't because I particularly enjoyed socializing. Rather, as a bookworm, I could remain cooped up inside with a good book. I wouldn't even mind not seeing anyone for several days. But that was when I was in my world, a place I knew well.

Here, I didn't know my left from my right. I was totally unprepared. Common sense and most of what I'd ever learned couldn't be usefully applied to any of the problems I'd encountered. Moreover, even if I wanted to discuss these issues with anyone, there was no one around.

I mean, outside of the “Boy Meets Skeleton” incident.

These invisible traps and evil shadows have haunted me since I was summoned…

The loneliness exceeded anything I could have possibly imagined. It wasn’t at all like when you spend your first night alone after moving out of your parents’ home.

***

With *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV* in hand, I stepped away from Zairein’s hideout. I stopped when I reached a small opening past the trees. With some distance between here and the house, I wouldn’t have to worry about damaging it if another *Create Pebble* calamity were to occur.

“Hngh…let’s get started!” I rolled up my sleeves and pumped myself up.

This may come as a surprise to you readers, but I was not currently wearing my lame pajamas. When I searched the house, I had found several pieces of clothing in decent condition. Some of them were damaged, while some were still wearable. There were even some that I didn’t know how to put on, once again underlining that I was in another world.

Anyway, that day I was wearing an outfit composed of something that resembled a dress shirt and pants combo from my original world. On top of that, I wore one of these wizard-looking robes. You know, the ones that open in the front. At a glance, it looked similar to an Inverness cape, if not exactly.

But then again, this was a sketchy claim, as I lacked any fashion sense in my original world. I didn’t even know the difference between a robe and a gown. Hopefully this outfit was considered fashionable somewhere?

At any rate, I think I resembled what a spellcaster would typically look like in this world. And it was all thanks to the gracious blessing of the affluent Sir Zairein that I could wear such a high-class robe. I might even have looked like one of those Imperial Master Spellcasters.

Then again, that handsome bastard Zairein’s limbs had been longer than mine, so the hem was a little long…

Clad in my dapper spellcaster getup, I ran my eyes across the book’s pages.

“Let’s see… First, I need to create an earth doll that will act as the base for the golem, right?”

Base… In other words, the golem’s main body. If this were a military-grade golem, it would require a special type of stone armor to be fitted on top of the base, but for a pacifist like me, that was irrelevant.

I took a deep breath.

Concentrate… Imagine the golem’s base shape.

Although I didn’t know the form golems typically took in this world, I wanted one shaped like a buff knight. I was a boy, after all. If I had to make a golem, I wanted it to look like a badass.

Imagine a dauntless armored knight.

Incidentally, my grades for art and crafts in elementary school were terrible.

"Form Base."

The area of the ground I was concentrating on silently rippled. From there, fine particles of dirt rose and converged in the air, gradually forming a humanoid shape. Slowly, they came together according to my mental image.

Most importantly, no absurd tornado of mana erupted from me like when I tested *Create Pebble* on top of the spell circle.

I can do this. So far, so good. I can…succeed!

"Done…"

Towering in front of me at two meters tall was…not a knight, but a mannequin.

I-I tried really hard, though. I used all of my crafting ability. I feel it… the ceiling of my abilities… Whoa, not the time for that.

I couldn't get distracted; it would cut off the mana supply and cause the golem base to crumble into fine grains of dirt in the blink of an eye, just like the boulder I created with *Create Pebble*.

I moved on to the next step.

Focus my mind…

"Reduce Weight."

This spell nullified the weight of an object created from Earth spells. It was a support spell designed so that physically weak spellcasters could utilize a larger quantity of dirt and rocks than they would otherwise be able to handle.

In this instance, a golem's base was sizeable, so if left alone, it would be too heavy for the golem to move by itself. Therefore, this spell was used during the initial design phase to render its weight more manageable. Although, it seemed you couldn't reduce the weight infinitely and the limit differed per person. What a strict world…

Well, whatever. This golem was just condensed dirt, so it couldn't be that heavy. I probably didn't even need to cast the spell, but I was faithfully following the procedure as written in the textbook. I'm a serious guy, after all.

"All right. That's the groundwork taken care of." While ensuring I didn't lose my concentration, I double-checked *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV*. Still looking good. Actually, it was going suspiciously well, given my track record.

All that was left was to input a short and simple command. Once that took effect, the golem would animate. The book provided several examples of these commands, and I randomly chose one from the bunch.

"Command: Advance ten steps."

The mannequin—er, I mean Golem No. 1—began to creak into action. The dirt-colored golem raised his right foot and took one step.

"Oh—oooh! A-amazing…!" I couldn't say why I was so moved.

Golem No. 1's powerful footsteps continued, one after another. What a promising stride! This guy was definitely powerful!

"All right, all right! Go! You can do it!"

I was going all-out, cheering Golem No. 1, and he was accomplishing his task magnificently. Right as he hit his ten-step mark, he slowed to a halt.

In the next moment, Golem No. 1 turned into fine grains of dirt…and crumbled away.

"W-waaaaah! Golem Number Onnneeeee!"

Well, that was to be expected. It wasn't like I had failed or anything. The spell's execution was a success. This was just the *fundamental* tenet of Earth spells: Once the spellcaster's supply of mana was cut off or the creation had fulfilled its purpose, the creation would crumble.

The command "advance ten steps" that I gave to the golem during its creation had been fulfilled. Therefore, the mana allocated to Golem No. 1 had been depleted. Golem No. 1's existence was only worth those ten steps. Earth spells were just like that.

Flagging under the weight of loneliness, I stared at the pile of dirt that used to be Golem No. 1.

I wondered, even though this land was usually warm, why I felt so cold…

***

"I guess the key really does lie in the command…"

After fulfilling its command, Golem No. 1 fell apart as per the fundamental tenet of the Earth attribute. This was the expected result as stated by the book, so the experiment was a success.

However, this wasn't a golem that demonstrated "deviance from the fundamental tenet of the Earth attribute," as described by Luvel Zairein.

Deviance.

That word meant that unlike other objects created with Earth spells, which disintegrated once their supply of mana was cut off, golems wouldn't. Real golems, not those meant for training, didn't decay. But besides this fact, no further explanation was offered in Volume IV.

I searched through the study again to find anything that could serve as a reference, but I only uncovered one book with a title related to golems.

Golems really weren't part of Zairein's main research, huh…

I pulled the book off the shelf. It was extremely thick, and the cover read: *The Study of Golems' Detection Crest and Its Application to Spell Circles.*

Authored by Tetheo Madith. Hmph…I suspected the content of this tome was slightly different from what I was looking for. Furthermore, judging by the title, it was probably exceptionally complicated. In fact, the title was already pushing my translation ability to its limit. What the heck was a Detection Crest?

I flipped through the book. Just as I thought, my translation ability had completely gorillafied and I couldn't read a word. This was painful… No! The truth was that bastard Zairein's study was just useless.

I had no other choice but to figure this out myself. After all, I wasn't easily broken.

***

I made several more creation attempts up through that evening. As a result, I got all the way to Golem No. 5. All of them were short-lived and crumbled away. Still, my work wasn't completely fruitless. I followed the example in the book word-for-word for Golem No. 1, but for No. 2 and onwards, I started testing various commands. What I discovered was that if the command was too long, it wouldn't work.

With a long command, the spell would misfire and the golem wouldn't animate, even if the contents of the command were simple. Conversely, as long as the command was short, the spell activated no matter how complex and abstract it was. For example, the command "Please fetch a lot of purple fruits" worked despite its conceptual focus.

Ah, by the way, the purple fruit was the glorious cranberry-apple, my current and favorite food source.

Still, according to the introductory book, creating a golem depleted much of the caster's mana. Therefore, it wasn't the kind of thing one could make on a continual basis…but I didn't seem to have this limitation. I felt like as long as my concentration lasted, I could pop them out all day. Far from running out of mana, I couldn't even feel it being drained.

I sometimes forgot my profession was that of the "Sorcerer King," and I had been chosen for it based on my absurd amount of mana. At times like these, I guess it helped to be an evil king destined to destroy the world.

I looked up to the western sky to find it dyed a resplendent gold. I needed to prepare dinner soon. The next golem experiment would be my last for the day.

"Then I'll start by creating the base."

When you create five golems in a row, you end up getting the hang of it. I decided to create it in the fine garden at the back of the hideout. I often passed through that area to get back to the house, whether it was to search the study or grab some food. During those times, I thought about trying my golem experiments there. Seeing how smoothly my experiments were going, I didn't think I needed to worry about *Create Golem* producing an explosion anymore.

But at that moment, my eyes suddenly strayed from the garden ground. I noticed something white sparkling in the light within the dense foliage.

"Eh? What is that?" I walked toward it through the trees as if magnetically drawn.

The lustrous mystery object stood shadowed by the trees. It was a lone, pure-white stone pillar. That sublime snowy hue left me captivated as

the pillar loomed in silence. It was roughly three meters in height and one meter in diameter, and it possessed an ethereal, transparent beauty that left it feeling eternally out of place.

"Why is this pillar here…?"

I lightly tapped on and examined it, but it appeared to be an ordinary stone. Nothing strange about it. It looked a little like the kind of abstract object rich people place in their gardens.

After gazing at the lovely pillar for some time, I was suddenly struck with an idea.

"If I made a golem out of this, wouldn't it look super luxurious…?" An immaculate white golem base would be unbelievably impressive.

Since I could now make golems so easily, I was starting to get a little fast and loose with the process. I wasn't thinking too deeply when I decided that my new golem would be made from this white pillar.

"Form Base."

The pillar dispersed into white particles and began to dance in front of me. It felt like I was in the middle of a glistening winter illusion. I slowly channeled my mana as it kneaded the particles together. Gradually, the mass formed the base of the golem.

"All right…"

The end result was a pure white golem that stood at a towering 1.9 meters tall. It still resembled a mannequin, like the others, but I had to say I'd gotten the hang of creating these guys. A mannequin was nevertheless a mannequin, so the design was rather rudimentary, if polished. Still, he looked pretty strong.

Also, compared to the pillar's original size, the body was quite compact. Furthermore, this time it wasn't a dirt golem but a stone one. It was definitely necessary to properly lessen the weight.

"Reduce Weight."

I carefully performed the spell I had repeated numerous times already. Yup, no problem this time either. I gazed at the magnificent golem base and let out a deep sigh. "Now comes the hard part."

I had several drafts for a command that would prevent a golem from collapsing. At the very least, I knew it couldn't be a completable task—otherwise the golem would fall apart as soon as the command was fulfilled.

In other words, I needed a command that could be executed but never finished. Something concise that could be observed and constantly maintained.

My thought was to start vague and gradually make the command more specific. In short, I planned to try out various short abstract commands like "Serve me forever."

"Command:…"

Now then, what *should* I command? Since "Gather a lot of fruits" worked, any abstract order would be fine so long as it could actually be

executed. At least I had as many chances as I needed, since nothing would happen if the spell didn't activate.

Right, there was no need for me to think so hard. As long as the contents of the command didn't diverge too much from my ultimate goal, I could spit out whatever came to mind.

"Obey me…?"

No dice. Ah well. As a cultured man, I didn't want a slave or servant. Though I didn't make golems because I wanted a conversation partner, either.

What popped into my head at that moment was my dumb dog back home. Now I wondered, though… I thought that he saw me as his owner, but he was more or less a free spirit. What exactly was he to me? He definitely wasn't a slave or a servant. When he disliked something, he made his displeasure known. When things got troublesome or when they didn't go my way, I would ignore him and read a book and he would run around in the garden. But at the same time, if I really needed him, he would stay and listen. And if either one of us were in danger, then…what would you call that kind of relationship?

Ah, there it was.

"Be my partner forever."

Silence enveloped the area. At first I thought the spell had misfired and casually planned my next command. Then I felt the air—no, the whole atmosphere—tremble.

If I recalled correctly, this feeling was identical to the one I had when I broke the seal on the Grand Stone Gate. I had cast spells several times since then, but I hadn't experienced that same atmosphere-vibrating feeling since that moment.

It was immediately after this feeling that it happened. I felt *something* forcibly being sucked out of me at a frightening pace. Last time, I used the crude example of releasing a fart. This time, it wasn't anything so meager. My power was being drained at a frightful speed. Was the power my mana?!

The torrent of power barreled toward the white golem in front of me. It flooded into the golem's form, which stood in icy contrast to the ferocious surge of mana I could feel beginning to circulate within the golem's body.

It wasn't visible; I could only *sense* it. But it was…s-siphoning off too much…!

As I continued bleeding vast amounts of power, my consciousness gradually darkened.

***

Let's start from the bottom up. At that time, I was gravely mistaken about golems.

As the introductory book had explained, golems were a topic of research at national military facilities. They were the subject of an academic discipline both advanced and complex. Therefore, there was absolutely no need for an introductory book to go into the nitty-gritty specific details of

golem creation, which would be lost on a novice. And anyway, the main author of the book, Luvel Zairein, didn't appear to be an expert on this subject.

Therefore, the spell *Create Golem* described in *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV* was as simple as one of those monthly subscriptions that send people parts so they can build their own walking robot. I only knew how to create the base of a golem, nothing more.

However, I unknowingly bestowed upon that petty base an inordinately demanding command akin to "Work like a near-futuristic sci-fi robot."

As such, this assembly-kit toy was forced to become a futuristic robot. Furthermore, the absurd amount of mana I had at my disposal as the Sorcerer King was imbued in it with brutal force. I assumed it would turn out to be a dud like my other experiments.

But I was unaware of other, hidden factors at play. A multitude of complex happenstances intertwined to beget a change that surpassed human understanding. Was it all coincidence? Or was this something that should be called destiny?

A simple, lifeless, disposable base of a golem.

A command that wasn't supposed to work.

A gentle Sorcerer King of Earth.

And finally, a sorrowful witch's—

I blacked out.

***

I woke up in bed and wondered exactly how much time had passed.

So sluggish. My entire body suffered from an unimaginable exhaustion. I slowly blinked. I felt dead. It was impossible to even get up.

Come to think of it, where was I? I could only move my eyes as I observed my surroundings; I took in the faint damage to the walls and concluded that this was the interior of a dilapidated home.

Ah, that's right.

I remembered. I was inside the bedroom…of a dead evil summoner… in another world…

Gradually, I came to my senses. No, wait, wait. I knew I was inside that bastard Zairein's hideout. But what was going on? I had just collapsed in the garden. How did I warp all the way in here?

And something else had been bothering me for some time now. A white mannequin was observing me from the side of my bed. I could literally feel his gaze. I was really being *looked* at. Ah. This guy was probably the golem I had created from the pillar.

He should be Golem Number…ummm…what number am I up to?

"Are you the one who carried me here…?" I asked, but the white golem was silent.

Actually, instead speaking, he slightly moved his body in response. He tilted his head as if to face his ear in my direction. Based on that gesture, he had to possess some intellect.

My experiment was a success! I was ecstatic, but regrettably, my body was still too sluggish to move. I didn't even have the strength to pose triumphantly.

I did know that I couldn't have crawled into the bed in my current state. Knowing my personality, I probably would have only made it to the entrance…and passed out right there. No doubt my new golem had brought me here and seen to my well-being.

I see. I've solved all the mysteries. Wait. Doesn't that make this golem a super-nice guy?!

My regard for my golem instantly shot up.

"I need to give you a name." A fine partner required a fine name. That was my style. And as names stick to someone for life, they're precious.

Let's see…umm… What should it be? Well, it has to be cool, duh. And a golem-like name would be good, too…I think.

"All right, I got it. Your name is Goltarou!"

Yeah. Simple yet sensible. A masculine name with a nice ring to it.

I slowly raised my upper body from the mattress and took in my creation. The pure-white golem I named Goltarou stood soundlessly beside the bed. Did my words really reach this guy?

"Hey, Goltarou."

Ah, he properly faced me. Seemed like he did understand. In that case, I had to introduce myself. First impressions are important.

"Thanks for looking after me, Goltarou. I hope we get along well. My name is—"

My name is… My…name… I froze. An inconceivable realization had consumed my entire mind.

"What is…my name?"

I didn't know it.

***

Since when? Name, family…

I was perturbed to discover that every defining memory I had about myself was littered with holes.

Thinking back on it, I had already sensed something off when I created Goltarou. When I was thinking about what kind of relationship I wanted with my golem, I recalled my dumb yet reliable pet dog. I clearly remembered how he would wag his tail whenever he ran to me and how his eyes would sparkle whenever I called his name.

Yet, at that moment, I couldn't remember what that name was.

Now that I thought about it, the reason for my unnaturally faint connection to my original world might be a kind of self-protective psychological reaction to the danger of being thrown into an unknown world. Right. I might well be even more devastated if I started ruminating

on the people precious to me in my original world who were terminally out of reach.

I had completely overlooked dozens of tiny feelings of distance and discomfort as I desperately adjusted to my dizzying change of scenery. But those discomforts all pointed to one truth: After being summoned, I had forgotten my own name and family.

With this revelation, one name popped into my head—that of the summoner, Luvel Zairein. This was entirely that guy's fault! Him writing that he had planned on controlling me to destroy this world threw me into a mental minefield so packed with danger that I couldn't help but miss some of my problems for all the detonations.

While I had so far managed to avoid the most dangerous of them—the spell that would destroy my memory and overwrite my personality, the horrid *Soul Transcription*—I did still get caught up in the hypnosis trap that had led me to the lip of that cave. Did that summoning circle in the field have some other manipulations embedded in it?

When I thought about how the inside of my head had been meddled with, I stumbled over the baffling nature of how I could understand this world's language. To begin with, how did my translation ability benefit that bastard Zairein? I mean, he was planning on completely overwriting my memories, right?

Speaking of benefits, *was* there one to be gained by making me forget my family, myself, and even my dog's name? Especially the dog bit. I highly doubted there was any purpose there.

Seriously…I didn't get it.

However, my ability to quickly adjust my thinking was one of my strong suits. "Well, I can't do anything now that I've forgotten."

Besides, it could just be temporary amnesia. And to be honest, my current situation didn't allow the time to worry about inconsequential things like my own name. I mean, if I acted carelessly right now, I could die.

I realized then that I had been procrastinating and distracting myself by playing around with golems since I had lacked companionship, when I really should have been working to get out of the basin. My food supply wasn't infinite.

In any case, I decided to describe various things in my original world to Goltarou with the added intention of reconfirming my own memories. People say that an effective method for organizing your own thoughts is to voice them for others to hear.

As such, I diligently began to talk to Goltarou.

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"And that's how I found myself in this world. My only keepsake from my original world are those lame pajamas over there."

Goltarou listened intently to my story. I still wasn't sure he truly understood my words, but when I mentioned the lame pajamas, he turned his head to look at them.

Looks like on top of being able to comprehend language, he was seriously paying attention. What a nice guy.

As I described my original world, I analyzed the full extent of my memory loss. As I had guessed, it wasn't exactly that I had just forgotten everyone's names. Rather, the erasure seemed most focused on those close to me. Furthermore, the closer the person, the vaguer my memories became. I couldn't recall, in order: names, faces, etc.…

What truly frightened me was that my memories of my parents and siblings were so vague that I couldn't be sure they even existed. Conversely, I could easily recall the names of the Japanese prime minister and famous actors. And when it came to my dog, it was only his name that I didn't remember; I could easily recall the names of other dogs.

That reminded me. I thought I had a cat as well, but likewise, I couldn't recall his name. What exactly were the parameters of this strange phenomenon?

I also remembered great figures of history. Halfway through my story, I ended up straying off topic for some reason and lecturing Goltarou about Tokugawa Ieyasu. However, Goltarou continued to listen as I went over the creation of the Edo shogunate. He was too nice.

Or maybe…this guy's super serious. Do you like Ieyasu that much? No, wait, wait. Your face is too close, Goltarou!

With his face so close, I finally noticed the strange pattern on his forehead. It wasn't that big, nor was the design too complex. It looked like an upside-down triangle, or possibly some kind of character. I didn't remember carving such a strange pattern when I created his base. Maybe it was etched there when the command activated?

"Hey, Goltarou. This thing. What is it?" I traced the pattern on his forehead with my finger.

Goltarou faintly trembled.

Oh? Even the way he reacts to me playing with his face is like a dog!

In that case, I had to fiddle with his forehead until he surrendered and learned who the boss in this family was, just like one does with pets at home. Oops, I don't want you to misunderstand me. This definitely was not meant to torment my adorable golem. It was a necessary process to determine our hierarchy.

"Oh, do you not like being touched here? Ha, you can't stop me. Hey, hey." I lightly poked Goltarou's forehead. Each time my finger touched him, Goltarou trembled a little.

Hee hee. For such a large body, he has some cute reactions.

Of course, if Goltarou really hated this, he could brush me off or avoid me, but he didn't. Although he looked up at me with a lightly defiant air, he was at my mercy. Even this reaction was incredibly dog-like. I was convinced. There was no doubt that golems were dogs.

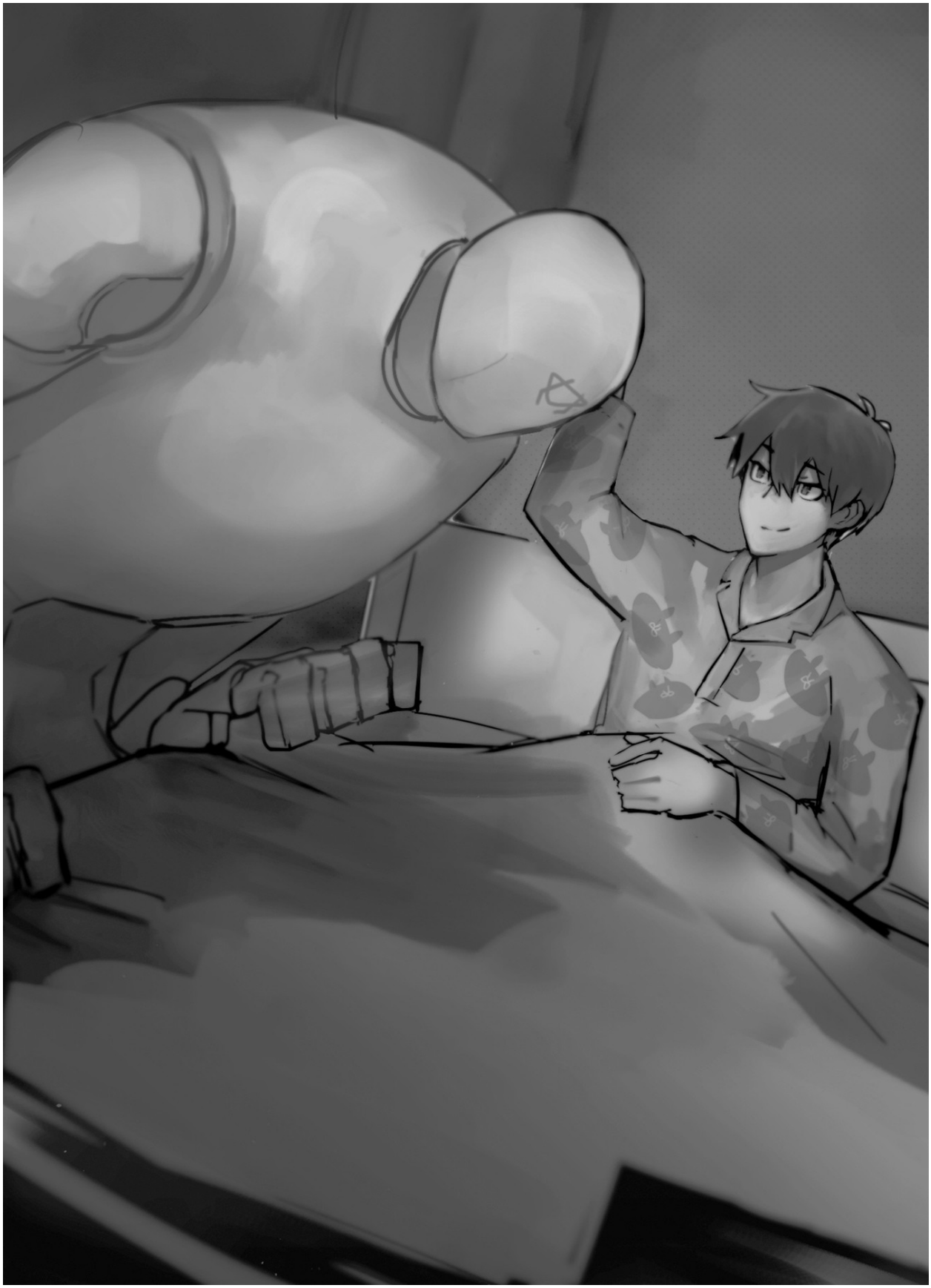
Suddenly, I noticed my continual forehead tickling had made Goltarou go a little limp.

“Oops! My bad. My bad. I went too far.” As I apologized, I gently patted Goltarou’s head like how I would pet my dog. “Ha ha. Your head’s surprisingly rough!”

This was probably due to my crafting ability. Forgive my inability to create something smooth!

Goltarou continued to stare attentively at my laughing face. Somehow, my mood began to lighten. Even the weight of my body seemed to fade, though it didn’t feel like I could walk yet.

But it really did feel good to have someone to talk to.



Chapter 7:
The Second Encounter

"ALL RIGHT, GOLTAROU. 'Hurray!' Raise your arms. 'Hurray!'"

Underneath the clear blue sky, I polished Goltarou's pristine white body with a rag. Goltarou obediently raised his arms.

Good boy. I'll polish your underarms until they shine… Yup, I think I understand how those hot-blooded bikers feel when they care for their vehicles.

It had been three days since I tested *Create Golem* at the back of the house. Then again, I wasn't sure of the exact time. I couldn't say exactly how long I had been unconscious. But I was bedridden for a whole two days, so I assumed it had to have been at least three.

I had spent all that time in bed, but I wasn't the least bit bored since I just kept telling Goltarou about Japan. I was glad for this part of the ordeal. Though for some reason, whenever he listened to my stories, his face would draw awfully close…too close for comfort. What an incredibly focused guy.

Goltarou even went out to harvest fruit in my stead. His dexterity didn't match his huge body at all. Even though his arms worked like an android's and looked like they could serve a mean punch, he moved with extreme delicacy. He could even have sewed if his fingers were thinner. *I'm sorry for my complete lack of crafting skills…*

Also, because I wanted to eat some glorious cranberry-apples, Goltarou had quickly begun to master a method of picking the most delicious ones.

H-he's too clever…

Well, in any case, stepping away from his general awesomeness, let's talk about my…not-awesomeness.

I had turned the Grand Stone Gate into an unforgivable mess when I opened it and triggered a Mentos Geyser explosion when I removed the binding on the stone book. Continuing that streak, I committed a catastrophic crime against nature with *Create Pebble*.

Lastly, *Create Golem* had been especially awful. After losing consciousness, I was bedridden for two days from the aftereffects, leaving me in the pitiful state of needing to be nursed back to health by my own golem.

I had no choice but to admit that I had no aptitude for casting spells. In any case, I didn't think I would cast *Create Golem* again for the rest of my life.

Thankfully, my physical condition had practically recovered. The fatigue was almost gone as well.

Incidentally, during my recovery I looked pretty "wild child" on account of wearing just a pair of underwear. I had been stuck in bed until the third morning, after all. The first thing I was doing now that I was

recovered was wiping down my whole body in the back garden. That meant polishing Goltarou had to come next.

"All right! Lower your head, Goltarou."

Goltarou curled his back and bowed. Yup, what a good boy. With the rag, I rubbed the back of Goltarou's head squeaky clean before giving it a smack. Then I patted him.

"Great. All done! Your head is really smooth!"

Now then, let's get down to the real business at hand today.

Hmm…? Wait. I felt something off about that thought just now.

However, I didn't think too much about it in the end. Why? Well, because I had noticed something even more out of place.

At that moment, since we were cleaning ourselves, the two of us were by the fountain at the back of the house. But there was a small hole in the ground near the trees a little ahead of us.

Was that hole there before? After wracking my brain for a bit, I remembered. Right. That was the location of the white pillar I used to create Goltarou's base. From where I had just been standing, it would have been in my blind spot.

Still, to think that such a weird hole got left behind by that white pillar. Just what kind of hole was it? At first glance, it looked like a well.

I approached it in hopes of checking it out. However, Goltarou didn't move from his spot by the fountain.

"What's wrong, Goltarou…?"

How strange. He usually stuck behind me like a baby chick wherever I went. He even tried to follow me to the bathroom, but as you might've guessed, I stopped him by the door.

"Wait. Now that I think about it, you…"

For the past two days, Goltarou had been trying to keep me away from the fountain.

The fountain was the only source of water, so I usually needed to go there several times a day. However, since I had created him, Goltarou had gone to fetch the water, ensuring that our supply in the house never dropped below a certain level, so I hadn't needed to go near it myself. Additionally, right before coming out to bathe, he had lightly pulled my sleeve, showing a faint resistance. But because I had been trapped in bed for two entire days, my entire body felt gross, so I ignored him and forced my way out.

Actually, I thought the act of pulling on my sleeve was a sign that he wanted to play. You know, the thing dogs always do that I so often ignored.

Even though I was still confused by Goltarou's behavior, I nonchalantly peeked inside the hole. I felt a slight flash of regret.

Ah, Goltarou, you were right.

At the bottom of this dark hole was the figure of a person lying on the ground.

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I hurried back inside the house, where I shrugged on some clothes and grabbed some equipment. After throwing on a random robe, I rushed back to the garden. There was no way I was going to enter a hole wearing just a pair of underwear. Besides, this getup was the minimum requirement for a gentleman about to show himself to other people.

Eh, what about Goltarou, you ask? He didn't count. Because he was family, I could even hug him in my underwear.

"Hey, you in the hole! You okay?" I stood at the edge of the hole and called out several times to the person inside.

Just as I expected, there was no response. To tell you the truth, the probability that the person in there was still alive was practically zero. But it wasn't *absolute* zero… And it was against my code as a gentleman to ignore that possibility, however faint it might be.

From what I could tell, the hole was over five meters deep. The inside was dim, so I wasn't sure, but I think the interior was wider than the entrance. At the very least, I no longer thought this was merely an old well. Furthermore, as the hole had originally housed the stone pillar, the entrance was also over one meter in diameter.

That should be enough space for me to enter. I took out the long rope I grabbed from the closet in the house. I would have Goltarou hold the rope for me at the top while I descended.

Although Goltarou was hesitant to approach the hole before, when he saw how resolute I was to enter, he accompanied me all the way to the edge. Seriously, what a good guy.

You got guts, Goltarou!

I wrapped one end of the rope around Goltarou's waist and grabbed the other. The rope was quite old, but it would hold, right? W-well, if the rope snapped and I fell, I probably wouldn't die. Though I might break some bones.

M-maybe I won't go down…

Troubled, I looked up at Goltarou's face. Right. Why was I getting cold feet all of a sudden? For the sake of Goltarou's education and my duty as a cultured man, I had to see things through.

Practically speaking, as long as there was even the slightest possibility that the person lying inside the hole still had life in them, I had to do something. The only person here who *could* do anything was me.

I steeled my nerves and resumed my descent. It was a surprisingly smooth journey. Or it was if you left out every time the rope creaked and I shook in terror.

On my way, I strove to avoid looking down in more ways than one.

"My feet should've reached the bottom by now…"

From the state of the inner walls, the structure of the underground space resembled a decrepit pit of several meters extending in all directions. It wasn't particularly wide.

Finally, my feet touched the ground. By then, my eyes had become accustomed to the darkness.

I should be right next to the person now.

Just as I readied myself to look in their direction, I heard a sound from above. I looked up to see Goltarou attempting to enter the circular opening directly above me.

With your size, isn't that impossible? Oh…? Looks like there's enough room. No, wait, wait, wait, wait! If you come down, then who's going to pull me up?! W-wait, Gol! No!

"Gol! Stay!"

I was a second too late. Goltarou placed his hands on the edge of the hole and pushed off, jumping down. Then he lightly kicked the inner wall, did a quick flip in the air, and landed right beside me.

I was speechless. He didn't make a single sound when he landed.

"What kind of motor skills do you possess…?"

Well, whatever. Given his dexterity, I was sure Goltarou could easily get us out of here. I no longer had to fear being trapped. *For the time being, I should be happy with that.*

I pulled myself together and took a quick breath. Newly resolved, I turned my gaze toward the person lying at my feet, and my eyes opened wide.

Would you imagine? It was a skeleton.

……

Damn it! Another skeleton! I expected this, but…! And given the circumstances, I did see it coming, but come on! So far, all the humans I've encountered in this world have been one hundred percent skeletons!

Sorry, I lost my composure.

"Hm?" I suddenly felt a powerful gaze being sent in my direction.

The owner was Goltarou. Of course, Goltarou didn't actually have eyes. He only faced me. But it still felt like Goltarou was *staring* at me, trying to gauge my reaction. For the first time, I sensed an unusually strong fluctuation in his emotions.

Was this fear…or extreme unease? Either way, Goltarou regarded me with apprehension. He scrunched his shoulders, shrinking his body. It seemed that the object of Goltarou's anxiety wasn't the body at my feet, but me.

Why was he more concerned about me than a corpse? I could clearly see that he was afraid of me, but there was definitely something else…

Goltarou's current appearance was that of a child curled up, about to cry, expecting to be scolded by their parent. Did he think I would be angry with him for preventing me from coming here these past few days? Did he join me down here, at the bottom of the hole that he so badly didn't want to approach, just to confirm my displeasure?

No, that didn't feel true.

Then why are you scared of me?

My train of thought hit the brakes. Well, duh! Anyone would be scared at their first encounter with a skeleton. Apparently even golems could feel uneasy. The temporal reality of it had slipped my mind, but technically this guy was a baby.

For my part, I had run into that bastard Zairein's skeleton right after being summoned and had then spent hours in the same room as him. Frankly, I think I might have become a little desensitized. However, if I continued to carelessly show indifference to this kind of thing, it might lead to misunderstandings later on.

Therefore, as a senpai in encountering skeletons, I had to alleviate my kouhai Goltarou's unease. I lightly placed my hand on Goltarou's shoulder and gave it a few soft taps. Then I showed him a bright grin. *Hey, don't worry. I, the skeleton veteran (by comparison), am here with you.*

The moment he saw my smiling face, the air around Goltarou softened and relaxed. At the same time, his anxious gaze vanished. It was gone so quickly that I had to wonder if all I'd witnessed was just my own imagination.

In any case, it seemed Goltarou was fine now. I returned my attention to the corpse on the floor.

The corpse, as I already described, was bones. As such, I couldn't tell its age or gender. Unlike Luvel Zairein's remains, the clothes covering this body were damaged beyond recognition. It was difficult to make any judgments based on outward appearance.

My gaze fixed on a certain point on the body. Its hands and feet were each restrained by shackles: strange hand and ankle cuffs. They appeared to be metal—no, possibly stone or resin. There also appeared to be some kind of pattern carved into their surface, but I couldn't make it out because the main part was too corroded.

At a quick glance, the cuffs were similar to accessories, like bracelets or anklets, but there was a reason I was able to immediately identify them as restraints. Chains extended from the shackles and bound the corpse's limbs to the ground.

This imprisoned corpse made me recall the stone book testament left by Luvel Zairein's skeleton. Zairein wrote that in preparation for the summoning ritual, he required not only his own life but the use of a "galvanizing sacrifice" who possessed the "primordial ancestor's blood."

Could that sacrifice be this person in front of me…? My eyes were now glued to the body, unable to look away. If I had slipped up anywhere, I could have ended up this miserably used—say, a me in another timeline who decided to go through the tunnel that day.

"Let's get those chains off you and make you a more decent resting place outside. Somewhere in the light…"

The chains connected to the shackles were short. The person must have spent their last moments lying on the cold, hard stone floor, unable to lift their body. I wasn't expecting any agreement from Goltarou when I

muttered those words in that silent underground space. I was only talking to myself.

"I don't want to leave you in this dark and lonely place…"

I took off my robe and wrapped the body in it. Goltarou silently helped me. His nimble fingers were as delicate as usual.

When I slowly lifted the bundle, which felt much lighter than expected, something small tumbled out of one of the tears in the ruined clothes. I caught sight of it and regret washed through me, fresh and awful. It was a barrette with a floral decoration attached, just like the ones young girls wear.

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In the end, there was nothing else of importance in the hole other than the victim's body.

I had no more doubts that the whole wretched setup was connected to the summoning ritual. I had discovered a small spell circle on the ground where the body had been restrained. It was similar to the other two spell circles I had found related to the summoning. However, there wasn't much else I could say with my current knowledge.

When I was about to leave the hole, I finally noticed at my feet—in other words, directly under the opening—a shallow, one-meter-wide circular groove in the ground.

"Ah. Could this be where the base of the white pillar was planted…?" In that case, did that mean that the stone pillar hadn't sat on top of the ground but actually penetrated deeper under the earth to touch the corpse? However, if that was true, then the amount of material I used to create Goltarou was much greater than I had anticipated…

As I considered all these factors, Goltarou carefully pulled the rope in my hand, lifting me out of the hole. That act interrupted my thoughts, pushing them aside for the time being.

After we left the hole, we buried the skeleton. I pondered for a bit and decided the grave would be at the site of the *Create Pebble* disaster.

The location was bright and had good air circulation. Above all, it was the place where I carefully planted the seeds from the glorious cranberry-apples I ate every day. I chose it because in the future, the land would become an orchard filled with the glorious cranberry-apples.

When that happens, I'm sure the body won't feel lonely anymore.

Chapter 8:
First Battle in Another World

"L-LOOK... Do you think it's a map…?!" Inside the study, I was staring at a piece of paper as I unintentionally raised my voice. "Hey, Gol! Goltarou, look at this! It's a map!"

I turned to Goltarou, who was standing behind me—

Whoa, your face is close!

For some reason, it felt like he had been getting closer to me ever since that incident in the hole.

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The day after our spelunking adventure, I reinvestigated the house. I felt it was warranted, as Goltarou's detection ability was amazing. He had a far better sense of the interior structure of Zairein's hideout.

I first realized the profundity of his investigative instinct when I was eating. At that time, I carelessly muttered, "Oof. Fruit's fine, but I miss meat."

All of a sudden, Goltarou began ripping up the room's floorboards. As he peeled the floor away with one hand, the creaks and cracks were deafening. Even though I was right there watching it unfold, I couldn't believe his strength.

But incredibly, underneath the floor was a fine cellar filled with food.

Should I be more shocked by the treasure hidden beneath the floorboards or the strength Goltarou used to expose it…?

As I stared in a stupor at the gaping hole in the floor, various comebacks swirled around my mind, such as "There had to be a more discreet way of discovering this bounty." I decided to set them all aside. I mean, my adorable Goltarou had gone out of his way to find some meat to fill my hungry stomach.

The cellar was substantial and had a ton of preserved foods, such as dried meat, a type of cheese and bread, and some kind of fermented dairy product. I didn't recognize everything in there, though. For example, there was a completely unidentifiable fermented pickled item and some unripe beans that resembled adzuki. There was also a section of foods that I had no idea how to cook. Once again, I'd run into something that shouted "you're in another world, dingus." Clearly, the food culture was different here.

Importantly, all the ingredients seemed to still be edible. More than that, what was really astonishing was the rye bread (I called it rye since it looked dark and the taste was familiar, but I wasn't positive) wasn't the least bit stale—and neither was any of the other food. I didn't even need to soak the bread in a soup to eat it.

The quality of preservation confirmed my suspicions. This house, or at least the cellar and study, were under some kind of spell. The difference

between the pristine condition of these two areas and the rest of the aged interior of the basin was significant, to say the least.

I wasn't sure if a time lag was an inevitable part of the summoning ritual, but it was clear there had been one between Zairein's death and my summoning. I mean, his corpse had turned into a skeleton, the home and furniture had deteriorated, and wild greenery grew rampant everywhere in sight, but the bread remained fresh and soft. That wasn't happenstance. That was intent.

"If I recall correctly, *Introduction to Spellcrafting* mentioned a Time attribute… Could that be it?"

The last volume of the introductory series, *Introduction to Spellcrafting XII*, focused on Time, describing it as an "attribute that manipulates time and space." Now, having seen its effect with my own eyes, I was convinced of its potency.

Since I only had an aptitude for the useless Earth attribute, my attribute-envy was pretty much through the roof.

Following the discovery of the cellar, Goltarou and I began our investigation of the entire house together. Although there were new little discoveries, such as the attic with a sunroof, none were as important as the map.

We uncovered this from inside a locked drawer of the desk in the study. I hadn't been able to get this drawer open for the longest time.

Hm? So how exactly *did* I manage to get it open then, you ask? That was, of course, you know…Goltarou forced his way through. He seized and crushed the heavy metal lock as if he were squishing a block of soft tofu.

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I sat on the veranda, bathed in warm sunlight, and read over the map while eating some cheese. Goltarou sat down close enough to snuggle me.

"Hey, Goltarou, this world's cheese is hilarious. Look at how super stretchy it is. Hngh." The cheese we found in the cellar melted and got gooey when warmed up. I wanted to show Goltarou how incredibly elastic it was, but the string snapped and the cheese stuck to my face. "Eww…"

I frowned at the tragedy on my face. Goltarou kindly wiped it off. The movement of his fingers as he touched me felt extremely timid and gentle in contrast to his rough exterior.

"Thanks, Goltarou. Sorry for causing you trouble…"

I've said this many times already, but my partner was a super nice guy. He was actually the one who warmed the cheese, and likewise, he handled almost all our simple chores. There did appear to be an upper limit to the precision of his fingers, but to tell you the truth, there wasn't a need for much of that given my current food situation. All he needed to do was cut the ingredients, boil some water, and start a small fire.

Speaking of which, Goltarou, you're so perfect that it's scary.

He was really good at figuring stuff out. There were even times when he knew things I was unaware of. For example, when he washed my clothes

in a bucket, he used soap. The soap had looked to me like a light-brown brick, and it had such a unique scent that I didn't recognize it as such. I hadn't used it at all when I did laundry. However, Goltarou used the brick right from the start.

I was at a complete loss as to how he'd known of the soap's existence. *Golems really are phenomenal, aren't they…?*

Furthermore, he cared for me with such self-sacrificing grace that I actually felt sorry for him.

Goltarou, are you my butler…?!

I finished the cup of boiled water prepared by my talented butler, Goltarou, and we looked over the map we found together.

It was rather simple; even I could understand most of it. At a glance, I couldn't make sense of some of the unique topographical notations and marks, but I didn't think they would be a problem as long as I could navigate to and see them for myself. Also, the arrangement of geographical features suggested that this wasn't a world map but a large-scale section of a region. The rivers and so forth were drawn rather wide.

"It's a bit inconvenient not knowing the actual distance, but…I think we should head to the closest settlement, Samari." I faced Goltarou and pointed to a spot on the map.

The area labeled "Samari" appeared to be a settlement. Of all the human settlements we could feasibly reach from our current location, it was the closest. Goltarou enthusiastically peered at the letters by my finger.

"Ah, by the way, I think the basin we're in right now is probably here." I had immediately guessed that the red mark on the map was, functionally, our "You Are Here." The handwritten characters beside it read: "3-24: Shell Basin—Final Candidate Site." Mountains and flatlands littered the area around the basin, but there was no indication of any kind of ocean.

"Hm…? Wait. Does this mean we're super inland? There wasn't much of a temperature change from day to night, so I just assumed we were near the coast." I crossed my arms and tilted my head.

Goltarou suddenly presented me with something.

"Ah, a glorious cranberry-apple," I said. "Thanks."

Vibrant pieces of the elegantly cut red-violet fruit were lined up on a wooden plate. I had noticed him doing something with his hands, but to think he was cutting dessert for me! What a truly kind and caring fellow he was.

The knife in Goltarou's hand looked so small in his great fingers. This green knife was made from a strange metal and was the only blade in the house that hadn't rusted. I suspected it was this world's version of a ceramic kitchen knife.

"Speaking of which, you're really handy with that knife, huh."

As I praised Goltarou, he very faintly shook his shoulders in delight. I imagined it to be like how a dog wagged its tail.

I gingerly stroked Goltarou's head. When I did, Goltarou seemed surprised and hesitantly drew closer, as though wondering if it was okay to be so near. He almost seemed about to cuddle, but right before our bodies made contact, he paused and drew back. He repeated this process over and over again. He looked just like a stray dog who hadn't yet learned to trust humans.

Hey, hey. Stop that, I thought. If you act like that, there's no way I can leave you alone.

"I'm not scary. Come here, Goltarou." I opened my arms to hug Goltarou with a warm smile, drawing him close. His hard stone body felt slightly chilly. I laughed. "You're cool. It'll be nice to hug a golem in the summer."

I looked up to find Goltarou's face right up next to mine.

"Whoa!" I exclaimed. "Isn't your face too close now?"

This guy's understanding of personal space was just abysmal. He really did seem like a stray dog who had been left alone for too long. Well, that was also kind of cute. Still, the way he looked like he would lick my face the second I took him into my arms just confirmed to me that golems were definitely dogs.

Back on track. There would be more playtime with my beloved pet. More importantly, the discovery of the map meant I could finally plan my escape from the basin. After all, we still couldn't stay here. Once we ran out of food, that was checkmate.

Plus, if we went to a settlement with people, I could gather more info. Depending on the situation, I might even be able to replenish our supplies. You see, I had money. A wad of bills and several coins had come out of that drawer Goltarou busted open, together with the map. However, I didn't know their value. Given Luvel Zairein's high social status, they were likely worth a good amount. I wanted to believe that, anyway.

I beg of you. Please let it be the case.

There was something a little off about them, you see. The words "Selvei Scrip" were printed on the bills in flashy letters. I still fostered some doubts about the accuracy of my translation, but it seemed likely this was not an official currency.

The scrips I knew of were notes distributed only within local feudal domains back in the Edo period. Due to their nature as a one-step-removed form of monetary compensation, their value was highly volatile. Even in the best-case scenario—one where they would be accepted at all—they had a wide range of value. Depending on how much time had passed between Zairein's death and my summoning, they could very well just be scraps of paper.

"Well, I'll worry about money when we actually reach a human settlement," I said as I turned my gaze from the money bag back to the map.

If I left the basin and headed south, I would be able to hit the road running east to west. From the looks of it, it would be big and hard to miss. Once I got on that road and turned west, I would be headed toward my destination, the village of Samari.

The way to Samari wasn't without landmarks. Along the way, there appeared to be a place labeled "shrine." Given the name, it would be some kind of religious facility, right? I wanted to stop there, though it wouldn't be our final destination. After all, I didn't know the details of what "shrine" entailed in this world. Frankly, it might not even be populated, unlike an actual settlement. But if this shrine was like a temple or church, then I hoped they would accept and house us as refugees of sorts.

In any case, with this map, I could do it. Up to this moment I had been in the dark, but this map was the light I needed to follow to leave the basin.

Let's hurry and prepare for our journey!

Even though there was still a good amount of food, my supplies weren't infinite. It was unclear how long it would take to reach the settlement, so I wanted to leave while I had an ample supply to get me there.

I had a more certain plan for clearing the cliff and getting out of the basin. I would cast *Create Pebble*—the forbidden, destructive, wide area-of-effect beginner spell that pulverized its surroundings with a ten-meter-tall "pebble"—against the cliff.

At least I could rely on this spell not to shoot debris in every direction like the Mentos Geyser fiasco resulting from my every use of *Open Sesame*. *Create Pebble* would only condense grains of dirt into a "pebble," just as the name implied. Therefore, if I were to use the cliff as my pebble-creating material, then, as the spellcaster, I could avoid catching the brunt of its destruction.

What's more, the height of the cliff surrounding the basin was roughly ten meters. On the other hand, I was certain that the size of the stone "pebble" I'd created was *several* tens of meters tall. In other words, my mere "pebble" was larger than the cliff.

While the cliff's thickness was yet to be determined, in theory, as long as I could carve successive pebbles from it, I would eventually shave my way to freedom.

However, even with all that said and done, I didn't know the spell's range. In other words, I didn't know how far away I could stand from my target. I definitely wanted to start testing this whole plan from a safe distance.

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I spent several days preparing for our departure. First came packing. I carefully selected ingredients that I believed to be nonperishable from the underground cellar, as well as a blanket and some changes of clothing. I also thought about bringing something to exchange for money, but this house didn't really seem to have anything of value. The only things I found

of possible worth were some unnecessary books and a few articles of clothing.

Ah, and I would need something to hold our drinking water. Given the local climate, there were probably locations along the way where I could replenish it…

Ah, right, and I couldn't forget to bring *Introduction to Spellcasting*. I was a studious man, after all.

I stuffed our luggage into a basket composed of wood and some rope. The basket had straps so it could be carried on someone's back. Goltarou and I had made it together.

The construction was quite difficult. Including gathering the parts, the whole ordeal took us two days. After all, I had no experience as a do-it-yourselfer. And, as surprising as this sounds, Goltarou had no idea how to make a basket, despite having mastered all those chores without ever being taught. In the end, the two of us faced struggle upon struggle before we finally completed our rudimentary basket.

Thanks to these labors, the bond between Goltarou and I leveled up. As you know, working together to build something is how the passionate friendship between men deepens.

One morning, we finally left the house. I picked out my clothes and shoes from the undamaged pile. I couldn't do anything about the slight mismatch in size, but they didn't feel exceptionally uncomfortable. There was still that excess in the hem, but I thought I might be able to get it tailored when I reached Samari.

Overall, the comfort level of the clothing and underwear was pretty nice.

To tell you the truth, I was initially quite resistant to wearing Zairein's old underwear. However, as if sensing my anguish, the kindhearted Goltarou repeatedly washed them ever so diligently. His sincerity alone gave me courage.

Thank you, Goltarou. I'm fine now. There's no problem. After all, these are no longer Zairein's underwear. They're brand-new underwear handwashed by you.

Under the refreshing morning sun that blessed our journey, I put on a new robe. It was the kind of robe that oozed needlessly expensive taste. I associated the one I was wearing before too much with the burial of that poor sacrifice, so this was a new one I'd chosen from the study.

Design-wise, though, it was practically the same as the old one—the unique Inverness style. This one was a deep olive-brown with beautiful golden embroidery. The olive-brown was the sort of shade you would pick if you desperately wanted to appear chic, though you could say it was actually a perfect fit for me as someone who could only use Earth spe—er, I mean, as a bona fide expert in Earth spells.

However, I didn't choose it for that association. It was just that the others were all red or white—colors that stood out too much. Since I was

unsure how I would be viewed by society once I reached a human settlement, I wanted to avoid anything too flashy.

Well, in any case, this would be my outfit for my journey from now on. *Let's get along well, Olive-Brown Robe-kun.*

At my side, Goltarou wore the handmade basket on his back. All our preparations were complete. Now if my golem held a book in one of his hands, he could cosplay as a statue of Ninomiya Gol-toku.

Because Goltarou was carrying the important luggage on his back, I didn't have much to tote. I had grabbed a small kit bag from the closet and stuffed it with our valuables: money, the map, and that green metal knife—this last in case we needed it for crafting or self-defense.

Of course, I also stuffed in a ton of the glorious cranberry-apples as well. Why, you ask? That should be obvious. Cranberry-apples weren't a luxury; they were a necessity.

The last item I crammed into the kit bag were those lame pajamas from my world. They were…well, you know, something I just couldn't get rid of…

"Well, now then…"

I stood a slight distance from the cliff face. Preparations: done. Escape plan: devised. Partner: by my side. We could make it. I was certain.

Now I just needed to carve into that auburn cliff with *Create Pebble*.

"All right, Goltarou. We're going to leave here," I said as I looked up at him.

It felt like he said, "Yes, sir!" with a reliable expression.

Okay, let's go! I thought. Then Goltarou tenderly lifted me in his arms in the so-called "bridal carry." *Eh? Hmm?! Huhhh?*

Goltarou's hands were exceedingly gentle, his fingers so delicate, like he was holding unimaginably fragile, precious glasswork—as if he was afraid that even the slightest waver would damage me.

Goltarou, are you my shining knight?!

For a second, I could feel Goltarou tensing his lower half. In the next moment, Goltarou jumped ten meters in the air over the cliff as he cradled me like a princess.

"W-w-wait… G-Gollllllll!!!"

The white golem landed softly and soundlessly. His feet touched down at the top of the cliff with ease.

……

What exactly had become of my carefully designed plan?

I feel like I should note, by the latter half of my scream (the "olllllll" part), Goltarou had already landed. My eyes were shut tight at the time, so I hadn't noticed.

You couldn't help it, I told myself. It was scary and all. It was so sudden… I'm not pathetic or anything… I mean, you know, Goltarou suddenly…!

Goltarou carefully let me down. I was being treated completely and utterly like a maiden. Or should I say, Goltarou really was a gentleman. If I were a young girl, this was definitely the moment I would have fallen in love with him.

I pulled myself together and stood straight. I couldn't remain the damsel clinging to his knight.

From the look of things, the top of the cliff was flat and continued for over fifty meters. There was nothing to see but auburn topsoil. In short, I was currently standing atop the auburn donut surrounding the basin. I wondered how such strange topography had formed.

The two of us crossed the red soil and soon reached the edge of the cliff.

"What…?" I could clearly see the world below, but I couldn't help questioning the sight.

An expanse of auburn earth extended to the horizon. It wasn't totally flat—there was plenty of variation in elevation—but there was no hint of green, and practically no sign of vegetation whatsoever.

Wh-what is this? How is it so stark out here and so lush in there?

Even if the basin was separated from the rest of the nearby area, it was just a small piece of land surrounded by a ten-meter cliff. Was the soil outside that different from that inside? Or…maybe it was something about the climate?

"Seriously…it doesn't make any sense…" I muttered.

Knowledge from my world didn't offer any explanation. This was hurting my brain.

"Ugh, okay, I guess first we need to find some kind of slope we can use to descend…"

I began my search for such a place when Goltarou once more lifted me up. I sighed internally. *Well, of course it would come down to this… Sure, this is probably faster.*

But how would *you* describe this situation? Goltarou pressed his face to mine as he held me in his arms, most likely to prevent me from falling when he moved. But at the same time, it felt like he was rubbing his cheek against mine. That cheek was smooth and felt almost soft.

Hm? Wait a sec. Soft…?

Goltarou jumped off the cliff.

"Auuuuuggghhhh!!!"

I couldn't help but scream as I was pulled straight down to the ground.

***

"Listen, Gol…Goltarou. The next time we're in such a situation, please wait until I give the signal before you jump. Until then, be a good boy and wait."

As the two of us ambled down an auburn hill heading south, I instructed Goltarou on what to do in future. Goltarou looked like he was obediently listening. But did he really understand?

Although I was still slightly worried about Goltarou's attitude, I couldn't get hung up on it. We were close to the location of the road as indicated by the map. My eyes scanned back and forth, searching for it. Truthfully, the exploring was getting me a little excited.

At several points, *Introduction to Spellcrafting I* mentioned living creatures known as "mana beasts." They weren't frequently seen, but this area was so remote that I thought it had to be possible for us to have a chance encounter with one on our way to Samari.

I had a sense that these mana beasts were close to what I thought of as monsters. At least, that was my assumption from the descriptions I skimmed through when reading. They were naturally endowed with mana and able to use various spells befitting inhuman creatures, thus the name "mana beasts."

Well, the humans of this world could use spells, so I suppose it couldn't be considered strange for other living creatures to be able to use a similar power.

Just a little…really only just a little, I want to punish an evil monster terrorizing poor innocent people.

And hey, I was the "Sorcerer King." If the Demon Lord was the boss of monsters, wouldn't that make the Sorcerer King the boss of mana beasts? And if that was the case, I wouldn't lose if we fought, right?

Also, I want to say, I was fundamentally a cultured man and thus not the type to swing my fists around like a savage. But there was a reason I was entertaining such thoughts. In the introductory book, I had read: "Generally, a golem's fighting capability exceeds that of the average mana beast."

Well, that was to be expected. If it looked like I was in danger of getting hurt, I was sure Goltarou would save me.

Besides, the book said that beginner spells would suffice for dealing with the type of mana beasts that usually appeared near human settlements.

I was envisioning a squishy, blue, jelly-type monster, or one that looked like a rabbit with a horn. Or maybe a cute pigeon, or a green caterpillar, or even a yellow electric mouse that would jump out from tall grass.

Well, if I thought about it more seriously, I had to assume the weaker species would inevitably get driven out of their habitat. I was sure there were additional inferences to make, but I had to stop or I would lose all confidence in my knowledge from my world…

In the end, the first mana beast—though I'm not sure if I could call it a "mana beast"—I encountered in this world wasn't a squishy blue monster or a slightly larger than average wild animal. And even though I had

realized I was in a tough spot in this world, I wasn't prepared for the ultimate gravity of this encounter.

Suddenly, Goltarou stopped in place and dropped the basket on the ground. Then he moved in front of me. His movements were so natural and smooth that they gave me some real bad vibes.

Goltarou usually followed at an angle behind me, and sometimes he would come up beside me. His favorite spot was a half-step behind. Depending on the situation, his position might change, but he never walked in front of me.

So why now…?

At roughly the same moment that question entered my mind, something emerged from the shadows of the cliff as if oozing out of the darkness: an unknowably black entity, standing on two legs.

<Heh, you noticed? Surface Detection…no, Constitutional Detection? Your golem's quite high-level, even though it looks like it could only be used for farm work.>

What was this strange sound? Was I hearing that black thing's voice? More importantly, it was huge. Its height easily exceeded two-and-a-half meters. Compared to it, the less than two-meter-tall Goltarou looked small.

<I suppose it's to be expected. Even though it's the weakest I've ever seen, that golem is still a retainer of the Sorcerer King.> The entity's odd voice echoed and gave off the impression of an actual demon.

Its muscles bulged abnormally and its enormous size made it look like a protrusion from the ground. While its silhouette reminded me of a great warrior, its bone structure didn't seem human. That jet-black body stood in stark contrast to Goltarou's snow-white form, but unlike Goltarou, this mysterious black demon felt *alive*. Its bloodshot red eyes darted back and forth, and bestial breathing emitted from the crimson gash of its mouth. A powerful heartbeat pulsated underneath its skin.

Its presence overwhelmed me in a way I couldn't grasp.

However, the voice coming out of this monster was unexpectedly youthful and left me with a weird feeling. At that moment I became convinced of a single fact: This creature wasn't the Level 1 monster a person reincarnated into another world is supposed to fight first.

No. This was a boss. Or at *least* a mid-boss, like the ones used in games to amp up the tension.

His mocking laughter rang in my ears. It was like…like a young boy waiting on puberty. *<You made me wait a long time. So you better at least let me enjoy myself.>*

The second he finished speaking, my brain was slammed with a violent bloodlust.

Thinking back on that moment, maybe that guy didn't want to actually kill me. Really, it was like when a satiated cat plays with a weakened mouse before finally putting it out of its misery.

But, being a modern Japanese citizen on top of a cultured gentleman who loved peace, I had never known the taste of battle, and the violent impulse that washed through me was overwhelming.

First time for everything.

"Ugh…!" My entire body stiffened, and I unconsciously groaned.

I think this was the trigger. Goltarou swooped in front of me. He was furious. He looked like a mama bear who had woken up from hibernation, burning with rage and ready to obliterate a mountain climber to protect her cub.

Goltarou, are you my mother…?!

<Hmph. Let me explain this, as you are newborn and clueless. The Shadow Demon standing before you is a life-form I created with sorcery, specially designed for close-quarters combat. Meanwhile, your golem's form is already fixed. Such a pathetic light-class golem won't even last ten se—>

Before our opponent could finish his scornful words, Goltarou lunged like a fired bullet.

Because I was completely overwhelmed, it felt like the black demon was looming right next to me. In actuality, the distance between Goltarou and the demon at the start of the fight was roughly ten meters. My pure-white golem catapulted forward and closed that distance in a single breath. It looked like he only took one—no, half a step. He was that fast.

The wide-eyed black demon was about to open its mouth, but in the end, nothing ever came out of it—nor ever would again.

Goltarou brandished his right arm, back muscles, and entire body like a whip. These weren't movements something made of stone should be able to make. Following a pure line of motion, his white stone fist unleashed its attack and smashed into the black monster's face.

The wretched demon's head was decimated by a force like that of a direct impact from a cannonball. Blood and flesh sprayed through the air. The headless lump of flesh flew backward like a thrown rubber ball. It crashed into the cliff with a terrible wet smack before crumpling miserably to the ground.

Stillness ruled.

Drenched in the blood of his victim, Goltarou turned to me. For some reason, I hallucinated him as a laughing, long-haired witch, intoxicated by the blood and slaughter.

"U-um…" I swallowed. What should a referee do in this kind of situation…? Ah, right, confirm the death.

I meekly approached the black mass on the ground. The bloodstained Goltarou followed behind me like a duckling.

I inspected the headless black corpse by picking up a branch and poking it. No movement. I couldn't detect a single sign of life.

"I-It's dead…"

And just like that, my first battle in another world lasted a whole 0.8 seconds without me lifting a single finger.

Chapter 9:
Monkey and Meteor Shower

A HEADWIND BLEW through the low hills that rolled across the auburn land. There was hardly a blade of grass as far as I could see. Goltarou and I pushed on down the long, wide road that stretched east to west as we searched for a human settlement.

Still, what a wide road… It was probably used as a roadway for large vehicles, but did this world really have the concept of traffic? I mean, I hadn't even passed anyone yet.

We found the road soon after we encountered the black demon. It appeared as though the demon had been waiting by the roadside to ambush us.

Upon its defeat, the headless corpse released fine black dust and, strangely, dissolved into liquid. I wouldn't have expected a living creature to disintegrate into particles like some lifeless golem. Did that mean the black demon had also been created with a spell?

I couldn't remember any demon-creating spell being described in the introductory books. Then again, they were just introductory books, and the only ones I really read were the general intro to spells and the discussion of the Earth attribute.

Even the blood splatter on Goltarou disappeared, seeming to evaporate. Ew. The one thing the black demon did leave behind was a lingering impression of filth. As such, I used a wet cloth to wipe down Goltarou's entire body.

The water I used to wet the cloth came from a sealed ceramic pot Goltarou had filled to the brim and carried in the basket on his back. This pot took up most of the room in the basket, which made for a fairly dicey transport method, but Goltarou's superior sense of balance mitigated the spills somewhat. He hefted the basket as easily as an elementary student wearing an empty book bag.

It appeared that Goltarou really loved having his body wiped down. Although he was the type to never really express his desires, he showed a bit of enjoyment when it came to this. Whenever I went to bathe, he would carry the cleaning rag with him. Likewise, whenever I had to do any washing, he would wait behind me and lightly pull on my sleeve.

That was why I swore to polish Goltarou's smooth, immaculate white body at least once a day. This was a pleasure to fulfill, as Goltarou had been taking care of me ever since his creation. Really, if you considered the actual amount of labor I had to repay, I would need to wipe down his body at least seventy times a day. In any case, I thought the fact that he enjoyed having his body polished was quite cute.

Come to think of it, a lot of dogs enjoy a good brushing…

Oh, speaking of dogs, did you know this world had monkeys? As we walked along the road, I noticed some popping up on cliffs and rocky slopes. Size-wise, they were similar to a Japanese macaque. They were also brown, though I suppose monkeys are usually brown. In this case, the meaning of that brown-ness was slightly different. It seemed the skin of these monkeys had…hardened over their bodies. Kind of like a bunch of stones had been glued onto them.

When I first noticed this, I was shocked, thinking they were covered in scales. Upon closer inspection, I realized the texture was really their pebbly skin, and I resigned myself to the fact that the living beings of this world were always going to challenge my expectations.

My primary mode of function was common sense, so I had a hard enough time wrestling with the notion of a scaled monkey, even if I was in another world. Monkeys made of stone, though? Hmph, impossible.

I know I talked about a blue jelly monster before, but as you've surmised, that was a joke. If a slimy invertebrate had attacked me at super-speed, my common sense would have noped out and switched to one of those technical difficulty screens of a beautiful lakeside backed by classical music.

I had accepted the existence of spells after witnessing the disasters I created by my own hand, so I did have to admit that evidence could sway me. But come to think of it, I still didn't know what kind of spell I'd used to turn that gate and book binding black.

"Oh…?"

I noticed one of the monkeys approaching me. Ah, were they friendly?

Sorry, fella. As a proud man of culture, I cannot allow myself to feed wild animals. Such a careless act would only negatively impact you and everyone else who makes this land their home.

Let me be clear: I don't particularly dislike monkeys. While their lumpy skin might be a bit disturbing to others, I don't discriminate against animals based on their appearance. In general, I think friendly creatures are a good thing.

"Hee hee. This guy's cute!" I said, smiling warmly.

The moment I did so, Goltarou buried a swift kick deep in the monkey's torso. Punted like a soccer ball, the monkey flew through the air and slammed into a nearby cliff.

"Eh?! Wha…? G-Golllll?!"

The monkey's body was buried in the cliff face, its neck and limbs bent in strange directions.

I-It's dead…

"Goltarou, y-you…"

How could you do such a thing?!

Tears filled my eyes and I was about to chastise him when I noticed a change in our surroundings.

For some reason, there were a ton of monkeys now. In fact, we would soon be buried under a flood of monkeys: on either side of the road, farther ahead, and even behind us. For how long had we been surrounded?

No, wait. Thinking back, I had suspected the number of monkeys lurking on the cliffs and in the lee of rocks was increasing as time went on. Furthermore, they seemed to be moving in the same direction as us. No way. Had they followed us from the start? Could these monkeys have been in the shadows of every step of our journey thus far? But why? Ah. Their intentions…couldn't be great.

I swallowed.

As he sent the monkey flying through the air, Goltarou moved in front of me. He dropped the basket on the ground.

"Goltarou, you wanna go for it…?" I whispered.

The moment I did, one of the monkeys leapt and landed in front of us. It let loose a strange cry and bared ferocious fangs, then charged.

Goltarou slapped it down.

The monkey hit the ground with such force that it died on impact. The lifeless creature was embedded in the earth while the white golem stood upright, utterly composed.

Immediately, more enraged monkeys rushed one after another to attack us. The first shots of war had been fired.

Goltarou mowed through the monkeys at an earth-shattering pace. Each time he released his white fist, a monkey's corpse danced through the air. His demonic attacks held not the slightest shred of mercy. He was especially merciless to those targeting me. This heartless onslaught brimmed with the fire of revenge.

Ugh, I don't feel good… I thought. In the meantime, what should I do?

While I frankly didn't think Goltarou would have any trouble with these monkeys, I couldn't help wondering what I could do to aid him. I grew up nestled in culture and ethics, so I didn't possess any wild brute power that could contribute to fending off these monkeys by force.

In that case, should I use a spell? At present, the spells I could use were Create Pebble and Create Golem.

Create Golem was, by every possible measure, out of the question. Furthermore, if I messed up the casting, I risked fainting and death.

So was it *Create Pebble*, then? I could probably create a giant rock, and if I created it directly above the swarm of monkeys, it could potentially be effective. I might even destroy a section of the swarm.

But no, the creation process was too chaotic. The whirling storm of dirt and mana would completely block my view. If I blinded us in our current situation, we ran the risk of a surprise attack. I might even trip up Goltarou.

The final nail in the coffin for this approach was the significant time lag between casting the spell and its completion. It would take up so much

time that the majority of the monkeys could flee before the stone was finished.

As such, I concluded the *Create Pebble* spell wasn't suited for combat.

Huh? Does this mean I'm absolutely useless…? Am I stuck mooching off Goltarou? Having been stabbed in the gut by heartless reality, I fell into despair.

This whole time, Goltarou had been running like a whirlwind, knocking down a continual stream of incoming monkeys.

I'd noticed this before, but Goltarou was a bit overprotective when it came to me. He prioritized my safety to the point that the two of us had been thoroughly surrounded from the front and behind. He was so completely fixated on the monkeys near me that he hadn't moved from his spot. At this rate, he wouldn't be able to break the enemy's center and ensure our escape.

Nevertheless, the difference in strength between Goltarou and each monkey was like that between the great winds of the vast sky and a pebble on the ground. On top of that, Goltarou didn't show any signs of slowing down.

The monkeys clamored and shrieked, becoming frustrated with the growing corpse-mountain of their comrades. However, they didn't retreat, even after having lost so many… These monkeys from another world were intense. Was it a matter of temperament? Or could it be that they were somehow still confident they could defeat us?

The second this occurred to me, a monkey larger than the rest raised an impatient roar from the rear of the swarm. The beast's furious cry echoed through the red cliffs and valleys.

I turned in its direction and our eyes met. It seemed like the monkey's expression distorted into a grin.

Then, movement. As if that roar had been a signal from the boss monkey, the remaining creatures raised their hands to the sky in unison. A bizarre scene unfolded. Streams of dirt rose from the ground under the monkeys' feet and whipped into the air. No one stream was particularly thick, but given the sheer volume, together they looked like a reverse-flowing waterfall.

What were they doing? I had a really bad feeling.

When all the dirt particles had risen, numerous stones formed in the air. They weren't pebbles, either. Each was roughly the size of a rugby ball. In other words, a massive number of cannonballs now floated overhead. If I took a hit from one, my skull would split, killing me instantly.

There were so many stones that they formed a solid dome in the sky. Simultaneously, they began to plummet—straight toward us.

I stood unmoving, only murmuring in a dazed stupor: "This is bad… We're dead."

Goltarou clearly hadn't expected this kind of saturation attack. To me, his blank face was replete with anxiety. He turned to me with a distressed look.

In the next moment, my entire field of vision was enveloped in pure white. Goltarou had rushed toward me at a blinding speed and covered me with his body. For some reason, I thought I smelled the sweet scent of a girl.

Did he intend to shield me? Could he? I didn't know the limits of Goltarou's endurance. I mean, did Goltarou himself have any idea how well his body would hold up against this assault? In all his battles thus far, he had relied on his abnormal strength and speed to end the conflict in the first hit. Not a single enemy had ever withstood that initial blow. Consequently, Goltarou had never had to defend himself. Worse, I didn't recall anything in the introductory books about raising the durability of a golem's base.

Damn, my partner might die.

I felt a dull pain around my forehead. All of a sudden, the smell of wet asphalt and blood resurfaced in my frontal lobe. I didn't know why, but I saw a white dog lying on the road. I rushed over to cradle his body, which was slowly growing colder.

Why did he protect me at that moment?

No. I won't let anyone else die.

I struggled to rouse myself from the sudden shock of that foggy memory. I wormed my trembling hand out from one of the openings beneath Goltarou and thrust it toward the incoming storm of stones. My cry tore my vocal cords. It was pitiful, but desperate—a plea.

"Stop. Please wait!"

Stillness engulfed the sky.

No matter how much time passed, the stones didn't fall. The monkeys gazed upward, dumbfounded. The stones had halted mid-descent like time had abruptly frozen.

On closer inspection, the rocks that were once brown as the dirt on the ground were all dyed…pitch…black.

"H-huh? What is this…?" I rasped as I popped my head out of the gap in Goltarou's arm and stared up.

In case you're wondering, that was easy for me to do. Goltarou's embrace was as profoundly gentle as always. He left me with enough room to move, letting me stick my head out as I pleased. Though if he had tightened his embrace, I probably wouldn't have been able to move a single millimeter.

But what was I looking at? As I tilted my head, I tried moving my hand. With each flick of my wrist, the black stones in the sky obediently followed like soldiers in an army.

"Ah! I think I can manipulate them however I want…"

I lowered my gaze back to the ground. The surrounding monkeys were no longer looking at the sky. Rather, they all faced me with eyes

frozen in shock. Their expressions were wrought in the shapes of fear and despair.

“In the meantime, I guess I’ll return your rocks!” I shouted.

The deluge of black stone bullets rained down on the swarm of petrified monkeys. It was a black meteor shower. The stones smashed directly into the monkeys’ heads, shattering their skulls, piercing their bodies, and smashing into the ground.

The ground shook in horror with each succeeding crash. An orchestra of thunderous roars, cries, bursts, breaking bones, and liquid splatter continued for some time.

When the area returned to stillness, there wasn’t a single moving figure in sight. The swarm of monkeys was decimated.

Chapter 10:
Night Sky and Proposal

HALF A DAY had passed since we were surrounded by that swarm of monkeys and were almost killed by their saturation attack. Since we then ended up encountering several more swarms, I had gotten more practice with this special move of mine.

The triumphant monkeys in this particular group raised both arms. Large, brown stone bullets the size of rugby balls formed in the air. This seemed perilous, but there was no need for concern.

First, I waited for the right moment to raise my hand toward my target, which was the monkeys' spell. To be more exact, I didn't necessarily have to raise my hand, but it was easier for me to focus if I did. I felt that it slightly increased the accuracy of the move as well.

Next, I made a small inquiry to the heart of the enemy's spell, such as: "*Rather than obeying those dumb monkeys, won't you listen to my request?*"

I could have used a commanding tone or an imperative statement, but the pride I held as a cultured man would not allow for such churlish behavior. I had decided to be polite whenever I reached out.

Now for the last step. The command I delivered next became the activation trigger. I think it was like the "chant" for a spell. The actual words of the command didn't matter. For example, the *Open Sesame* I used before would work, but even something like *Pain, pain, go away* would do the trick.

What should I use this time? Um…

"Eat this, you damn monkeys!"

The brown stone bullets were dyed black in the blink of an eye. With this color change, I had gained complete control of the spell, stealing it from my enemy.

Mm, but I shouldn't keep using these random commands, I thought. After all, this was my only special move. In the near future, I wanted a cool name for it.

"Bwa ha ha! You barbaric monkeys! Know the true strength of the strongest primate!" I shouted as I made the jet-black rugby balls swoop through the air and chase after the monkeys.

The confounded beasts raised hell, crying in terror as they attempted to escape. They scattered toward the cliff edge.

Ha ha, serves you right, I thought, then winced. Ah, one of them fell off.

It was spectacular. Once I stole control of a spell, I could do whatever I wanted to it. I could manipulate it as easily as moving my own limbs. This power was likely the *true* culprit behind the opening of the Grand Stone Gate and the explosion of the binding on the stone book, seeing as those

two were both dyed black before being obliterated. However, I couldn't use this move until my opponent first cast a spell. Therefore, tactically, my special move could only really be used for defense.

As such, it was utterly powerless against the monkeys' melee attacks. In those cases, our team could only rely on Goltarou's kicks and punches.

"Nevertheless, the mana beasts seem to lose their fighting spirit as soon as I steal control of their spells…" I mused.

The monkeys' expressions when their stone bullets began turning black were, if I had to describe them in a single word, tragic. Their despairing faces resembled those of someone who lost the person or thing they trusted most in a single breath.

How would you describe such a thing? Hmm.

Ah, right. That was the expression of a husband finding his wife of many years had betrayed him with the plumber.

"All right. I've decided." I turned to Goltarou. Then I announced, with a grin stretching from ear to ear, "My special move shall be named *NTR*!"

What do you think, Gol—whoa, your face is close! Y-yeah, I think Goltarou was complimenting my sense of naming. Well, he was a nice guy, so I was sure that even if we were in a parallel world where my sense of naming was catastrophic, he wouldn't abandon me.

I had learned my special move *NTR*, but the first battle with the monkeys was the only large-scale run I'd had with it. All the battles since had been fleeting things. The fight just now only involved twenty monkeys.

That was partly due to how Goltarou seemed wary of being surrounded by monkeys now; as soon as he spotted one, he would charge off to eliminate it. Whether they were hiding in the cliff's shadows or stationed in a blind spot, Goltarou would promptly discover and crush them.

Incredible. He was as merciless as a housewife who discovered an insect in her kitchen.

To tell you the truth, Goltarou looked kind of excited whenever I used *NTR*. Every now and again, he would purposefully let a few harmless monkeys slip past his mysterious radar.

Goltarou, is that really the caring, gentlemanly thing to do…?

Moreover, if he possessed such amazing perception, how did he let that swarm of monkeys surround us in the first place? Was it that the difference in their combative strength made him underestimate them?

No… I shook my head. I think Goltarou never saw the monkeys as a threat—not in the beginning.

When I thought back on it, when we first observed the beasts, I started nonchalantly describing the monkeys from my original world. Was that carefree attitude in the face of potential danger the cause of our current troubles? Was everything my fault? But if that was the case, at what point did Goltarou realize the monkeys were our enemies?

I doubted monkeys were the only mana beasts in this world, so I was sure we would face more dangers in the future. As such, it was critical to

our safety that I grasp the way Goltarou determined whether something was dangerous.

What bothered me most was that I was pretty sure Goltarou had started this war. What was the exact moment it all went sideways? I wracked my brain when it suddenly hit me.

Ah. Right before Goltarou fired the first shot, I had admired a monkey by calling it “cute.”

A roar suddenly ripped through the air. Goltarou had just sent a giant monkey flying into the red cliffside, where it died on impact.

Um, what was I talking about again?

Right, I was talking about big monkeys. I was actually a little bothered by them. It seemed that the farther west we went, the bigger they got. The first monkeys we encountered were about the size of a Japanese macaque. However, their average size now was as big as that boss monkey from the first swarm.

Nevertheless, the difference between their strength and Goltarou’s was like that of an ant and elephant.

Still, mana beasts infested the road, and after half a day of walking, we had yet to encounter a single person. I was beginning to nurse a faint sense of unease.

Nevertheless, the two of us continued westward, heading toward the setting sun.

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Underneath the night sky, I hadn’t yet fallen asleep. I drifted off once but woke right up, shivering.

“C-cold…” I muttered through my teeth, which chattered in the bone-chilling wind.

My breath was white in the moonlight. I hadn’t thought the temperature would drop so low at night. This was definitely the climate of somewhere inland.

Then what exactly *was* going on inside that basin? It was a completely different world in there. And there had been no mention of such a climate difference in anything Luvel Zairein left behind.

I did remember him writing that the basin wasn’t isolated by topography alone—that there was also a barrier of some kind. Was that the reason why? Were barrier spells that amazing? *I thought they would be like those barriers in Japanese shrines…*

Since Goltarou was tending the fire, it hadn’t been extinguished. But the fire and the thin blanket weren’t enough to stave off the cold. The frigid air and relentless wind mercilessly ate away at my body temperature.

Once the sun had set, the monkeys suddenly stopped their assault. They probably knew about the temperature drop. Those damn monkeys were spending the night all warm and cozy in their burrows, tucked away from the chill. Damn it!

I was raised in the heated rooms of modern Japan, so I was unaccustomed to the terror that was nature. Ugh. This was bad. Really bad. I had planned and packed for the journey based on the forgiving climate of the basin.

What should I do…? I wondered hopelessly.

Then Goltarou sat down in front of me. Silently, he opened his arms as if he were inviting me to sit on his lap.

"Y-you… Goltarou, are you going to block the wind for me…?" I asked. *Sorry and thanks, Goltarou. I'm going to cry at my own worthlessness.*

A great figure of history once said, "Cold and hunger will weaken the soul." Spiritually drained, I sat between Goltarou's knees.

They were soft like silicone. I had no doubts now. My golem could adjust the hardness of his body. He was attentive to every little detail to ensure that feeble and fragile little me didn't get hurt.

Ah, I'm crying again… I leaned into him. "Hey, Gol, your body feels kind of warm…"

For some reason, I thought I felt soothing warmth coming from his body.

You kidding me? How does he do that? I can't even anymore. I was powerless, uneducated, and ignorant… I couldn't even fathom what fundamental law could imbue warmth into stone.

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Roughly thirty minutes later, I was wrapped in the blanket and Goltarou's soft, warm embrace. I stared at the night sky while chewing on a piece of dried meat warmed by the fire.

I want to try this meat not with salt, but spices, I thought. Just warming it up had coaxed out the smell and flavor beautifully. This was probably some high-quality meat.

The sky looked like an expansive indigo sea above my head. The two moons floating there were breathtaking, and once again drove home that this was another world.

No, wait. I peered. *It might not just be two.* Although I said "moons," I realized there could well be other celestial objects orbiting the planet. Maybe even three or four. *Wait, that's right. That means, depending on the situation…*

I shook my head slightly. No, let's stop coming up with theories.

I was losing confidence in my knowledge of the laws of nature… To be frank, that confidence was as wavering as a candle in the wind.

Ah, you know what? That's probably a magic moon. If a green hermit were to fire a spirit wave at it, it might be blown away.

I sighed, and my sigh was white. Now that I thought about it, this was the second time I had gazed at this world's night sky like this. The only other time I was active after the sun set was my first night after being summoned.

This world didn’t have any artificial light… No, that wasn’t entirely true. Those devices in the hideout and inside the cave were a form of illumination, but I didn’t know how to operate them. As such, whenever the sun set, I would head to bed.

It had been troublesome, but I hadn’t found anything to light a fire. It was highly likely that the previous owner of that house, Zairein, had just relied on fire spells.

But my Goltarou, on the other hand, was super-amazingly good at starting fires. And you know what? That made this a win for the Earth attribute against the Fire attribute. There was no longer a need for Fire spells, not for us—no, the world! The Fire attribute was a relic of the past. Goltarou’s fire-starting feat alone had given historic meaning to his creation. With Goltarou’s power and versatility, I could light a fire in no time.

He really was helpful, while I was no match for him.

The fire crackled and spat out embers. Goltarou quietly tended it while holding me.

As the world outside the basin was a barren wasteland, there was plenty of dead vegetation. We didn’t lack for firewood. Many of the places we passed had tall, dead trees packed close together, making me think the area might once have been a forest.

Did that mean that up until some point, the local climate was tree-friendly? What had made it look the way it did now?

As my mind slipped through such thoughts, I began to feel drowsy. I was warm, full, and comfortable, and there was an unbelievable sense of safety to be found within Goltarou’s arms. Ah, it was like being nestled in a down futon in the middle of winter.

Goltarou, are you my bed…?! My consciousness waned under creeping drowsiness. In this state, a thought popped into my head. Thanks to Goltarou, I can be warm. I can rest easy. I have to thank him.

As a cultured Japanese man, I would say this to convey my deepest gratitude toward my warm futon: “I’ll marry Goltarou…”

Yeah, I proposed to my bed.

For just a moment, I felt Goltarou’s embrace tighten a bit. However, by the time that happened, my consciousness was falling into a deep sleep.

Chapter 11:
Barbarian Queen's Awakening

REMEMBER BEFORE when I said that there was no way a monkey's body could be made of rocks? Sorry, that was a lie.

Of course, I'm talking about the monkeys in this world. Because my Goltarou had been mercilessly killing monkeys throughout this journey, I was getting tired of seeing their corpses lining the side of the road.

Strictly speaking, as these monkeys had guts and bones, their insides most likely resembled those of a normal vertebrate. However, their hardened covering was indeed entirely made of stone. Because they could use Earth spells to create rocks as well, I theorized that they manufactured this stone armor with a spell and stuck it to their body with a continual flow of mana. However, there was a flaw in this theory: If a monkey's mana supply was cut off at death, why didn't the stones on its body crumble away?!

Ah, I can't anymore… Stone monkeys… My knowledge of how the world should work had been completely demolished.

On the topic of monkeys, there was another impossible thing about them. As you know now, the stones created by the monkeys via Earth spells flew through the sky when they attacked. Such a thing could not be done.

I was a little slow on the uptake, seeing as how moments after I first witnessed these flying rocks, I also controlled them via *NTR*—like RC toys! But such a physics-defying feat should have been impossible for an Earth spell.

You see, if the Earth attribute were capable of firing a cannonball, it wouldn't be treated like trash. When you created a rock, it was fixed to its location on the ground. The Earth attribute's crummy track record continued into effect-longevity: If you lost concentration, everything you made would fall apart.

This was the reason why attributes that dealt with solid mass, such as the Earth or Ice attributes, were difficult to use in battle. However, Ice spells could manifest effects anywhere in the atmosphere, so they could utilize height difference and gravity in attacks. This actually gave the attribute a unique edge. Besides, the ability to freeze one's surroundings was in itself impressive, not to mention useful. All that utility made Ice fundamentally different from the Earth attribute and its useless rock generation.

Admitting this to myself was getting depressing, so I tried to mentally drop the topic.

In short, these monkeys were mystery upon mystery, and their appearance was only the start. They were on my mind for a reason, even though there were no monkeys at present. To be precise, a few were

littered across the ground, but they were dead. In fact, their corpses lay in heaps by the roadside.

My Goltarou hadn't done this.

A majority of the corpses were already skeletons. The rocks that covered them were piled on top of and between the bones, painting quite the bizarre tableau.

I went up to some of these corpses to examine them more closely. After all my unpleasant prior exposure to skeletons, I was building up an unfortunate tolerance for them.

The monkeys in this area were quite large. Size-wise, they could be on par with gorillas. They would still perish in one hit from Goltarou.

"This one, most likely, had its cervical vertebrae…severed," I said.

In other words, the monkey's neck was cut, killing it instantly. The clean stump on the rock body, where the trunk of the neck should have been, indicated that it had been halved in one swift motion. I checked some of the other rock-pile corpses, but this was the only visible injury on any of them.

My Goltarou consistently beat the monkeys to death. By comparison, this was a clean and tidy approach.

Goltarou poked his head over my shoulder to look with me. I could barely believe this was the same guy who got so spooked when we found that skeleton underground. Was he building up a tolerance like me?

Goltarou rubbed his cheek against mine as he looked at the monkey's bones.

He he, are you interested, Goltarou? Mammals have seven vertebrae. No, wait. Was seven the right number? This monkey appeared to have seven… I had to remember that my background knowledge was unreliable. I should probably have stopped smugly explaining things to Goltarou, but he was such a passionate student that I couldn't help wanting to teach him.

No, no, no! This wasn't the time for such activities. No matter how you looked at it, we weren't in some tranquil learning environment. The monkeys in front of us had been decapitated.

"Come to think of it, that shrine should be around here…" I said.

By my reckoning, we were nearly on top of the facility labeled "shrine" on the map. However, the scale on the map was larger than I had estimated. Therefore, after we passed the shrine, we wouldn't be too far from Samari.

If I thought logically about the situation, the monkeys had most likely been eliminated by the ones in charge of the shrine or by the people of Samari—though I was a bit baffled as to why their remains were left on the roadside.

"Hm? Wait, what is this…?" I murmured. I had noticed something shining inside the monkey's skeleton. When I picked it up, it appeared to be a dark-brown crystal the size of a dry-cell battery. Color-wise, it was practically black. When I rotated it in my hand, the corners reflected the

light. I felt like I had seen just such a strange crystal before. “Ah! This looks like the jewels on the cane that bastard Zairein was holding.”

The crystal’s color and shape were different from the heap I had seen on the cane, but I was sure that if this rough stone were processed, it would look identical.

When I checked the other bodies, I discovered the same kind of crystal nestled inside them.

“Hey, Goltarou. Do you think we can sell these?” I asked as I showed him the black crystals.

Goltarou peered at them, interested.

“Hey, Gol. Did you know? A sperm whale’s gallstone can sell for a stupidly huge amount of money.”

Goltarou listened intently. He really was dedicated to learning, but I felt like his face was yet again too close.

At any rate, as far as money went, right then I had only a few coins and some suspicious bills. Even if these crystals only had a modicum of monetary value, I would benefit from grabbing as many as I could. Besides, being so small, they wouldn’t add too much bulk to our load.

The true nature of this crystal was totally beyond my ken. However, my common sense had short-circuited somewhere while trying to understand these strange monkeys, and I was operating largely without it. My head and heart broken, I gave up thinking too hard about it.

I began to gather the black crystals from the corpses. With Goltarou’s help, I soon filled a light sack.

Looks like I’ve picked the area clean, I thought. That should be enough.

In truth, I couldn’t stand to gather more; I was afraid of the heartbreak if it turned out I’d wasted time gathering crystals worth no more than the pebbles on the ground.

Still, I hadn’t noticed any of these crystals inside the bodies of the smaller monkeys the two of us blasted through on our way to this point. Could crystal development in monkeys be related to size?

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Soon afterward, we arrived at the shrine. It was a massive white stone building whose architecture stood out from the bleak expanse. It made me think of an ancient temple. In other words, there was no doubt that it was the shrine. Besides, there was nothing else around. As usual, there was no sign of life either. Was this another uninhabited building?

No… Three white figures were moving about in front of the shrine’s entrance. At first I thought they were those large monkeys, but the monkeys weren’t white. Thus far, they’d all been brown. And I’d seen a lot, but never yet encountered a single albino variant.

“That means… Could they be people…?” My chest swelled with anticipation.

However, when I drew closer I came upon a bizarre sight—walking Greek statues.

Wait, were they actually statues of Greek goddesses? Was it a trick of the eye? A mirage? No, nope, sorry, brain! These white goddess statues were, for some reason, moving. For a moment my thinking once more shorted out and played a scene of an idyllic old European castle backed by classical tunes.

Then I noticed something. Each of these Greek statues had a pattern on its forehead. There was some slight difference in shape, but one woman's forehead pattern actually resembled Goltarou's.

Aha. These women were golems. They were white, had patterns on their foreheads, and looked so alike that they seemed to be relatives. Even their size was more or less the same across the board.

Well, my Goltarou is made with a beautiful white material of superior quality. He he… How surprising; I'm quite the doting parent.

The golems had noticed our presence, but they didn't seem to show any signs of hostility. Far from it—they moved aside, making a path to the entrance as if they were welcoming us as visitors to their shrine.

How friendly. What stunning customer service.

Just in case, I instructed Goltarou, "If there are people or golems in the shrine, you cannot punch them unless I give the order."

He was a clever guy, so I didn't think I had to worry, but I also wanted to avoid any unnecessary trouble. After all, Goltarou had never met another human being besides me. Well, saying that, the only people *I'd* met in this world were skeletons.

"Guess we'll just make ourselves at home inside," I said. "They gave us a warm welcome, after all."

As I walked inside the shrine, I took another look at the Greek statues. Each of the women had their own unique design, but in general, they were all tall and had long hair falling down their back to around their waist. They also wore armor covering their chest and held some kind of polearm. Only the one in the middle had a different color for her weapon and armor. She seemed to be their captain.

But why were their chests so large? Honestly, I'm talking bombastic levels of bosom. Was their creator some kind of pervert…?

As I squinted at the captain's chest, I sensed a sudden bloodlust boiling behind me.

Ah. Bad. I quickly and unconsciously moved, driven by experience and intuition. It was like when you're walking your dog, encounter an unfriendly dog, and the two are about to fight. Sensing their spiking aggression, you pull on your dog's leash to stop them.

I realized I was tightly gripping Goltarou's arm. Goltarou stared blankly at my face.

Huh? He doesn't seem bothered at all. Was that bloodlust just my imagination?

And why was I gripping Goltarou's arm so desperately? I tilted my head as he walked right past the golems and into the building.

As I passed by as well, I got a better look at the weapon in the golem's hands. It resembled a naginata. While the pole was shorter than an actual naginata, the blade was wider and larger. I'd never seen such a weapon in my original world. The thick blade looked heavy, but the material didn't seem to be metal. Most likely, this was a long melee weapon made out of some kind of stone.

I was suddenly sure that it was what had been used to slice the heads right off those stone monkeys. We were really lucky that these women didn't view us as hostile.

We passed through the front of the building where the golems were stationed, continued though a row of columns, and stepped inside the expansive interior of the shrine.

The stone facility within resembled the ruins inside the cave back in the basin. However, the architectural design followed a different sensibility. The shrine was transcendentally beautiful and the decorations meticulously detailed. From what I could tell, it had required significant artistic skill to craft. Unlike the stately and straightforward nature of Luvel Zairein's tomb, whose infrastructure felt masculine, this white shrine had a feminine air.

Even the stone ceiling's design was gorgeous. Elegant women were depicted on the high relief. Were they this world's goddesses? A woman clad in fire, a woman accompanied by birds, a woman veiled in thin cloth, a woman holding a strange staff with a wheel… From this angle, I could only make out the images of these four, but going by the design, I believed there were likely somewhere around ten figures on the ceiling.

"This is a really impressive place, but…" I trailed off. Still staring up, I let out a sigh of mixed admiration and disappointment. Nowhere inside this shrine had I seen any sign of movement, let alone life. "Is there no one here either…?"

As there were golems, I had expected to see some people, but this complex really was uninhabited. Were the golems outside like security robots, then?

Either way, nothing alive was inside of this old building. There was only the sound of the wind whispering between the line of broad pillars.

No…on closer inspection of the interior, there appeared to be something standing in the corner—a headless golem. If I had to use a famous example to describe it, it would be the Winged Victory of Samothrace. However, I was pretty sure Winged Victory was bigger than this figure.

At first glance, she looked like a normal statue, but her shape too closely resembled the Greek statues outside. Also like them, armor covered her chest and that strange weapon was in her hand.

I approached her, but she didn't seem to react to us. She had no head, so she was probably already broken. Yet I couldn't bring myself to look

away from this headless Greek statue standing alone inside the shrine. To tell you the truth, I wanted to investigate something.

"I wonder what kind of material was used as their base…"

I wanted to know more about how these golems were created. When I made Goltarou, I made sure to consider the mobility of his joints, although I still crafted him according to the textbook's instructions. As such, Goltarou's base design ended up resembling a mannequin.

However, these golems were shaped exactly like Greek statues. So how did their joints work? Come to think of it, whenever Goltarou threw a serious punch, his body moved like a whip. Likewise, I had confirmed his ability to adjust the hardness of his body. Did that adjustment factor work on the same principle as his fluid movement?

I nodded. "Let's check it out." I loved learning, and I considered myself a man always seeking to expand his knowledge.

In the name of that expansion, I closely examined the headless golem's body, slowly feeling it all over. As expected, it felt like a smooth stone. The smoothness continued around its elbow joints. Hmm, how about around the waist? And exactly how were these fluttering clothes made? Were they trimmed from the base or wrapped around it after? I continued to dive deeper and deeper into my examination.

However, looking back on it, I probably shouldn't have let myself get so involved…

As I was tinkering with the golem, I felt an abnormally intense gaze on my back coming from Goltarou. However, this had been happening a lot recently, so I wasn't the least bit concerned. I was thoroughly engrossed in my investigation of the golem in front of me.

I wonder what exactly Goltarou was feeling at the time. Did he see me as a pervert who loved statues of beautiful girls and got excited feeling them up? Urgh, I'm sure that was exactly what he saw. And I'm sure that seeing his partner's disgraceful behavior, Goltarou felt pity, sadness, and deep regret. But since he was kind, he didn't know how to vent his anger. Furthermore, Goltarou was an extremely thoughtful guy who could read the mood.

You could say that, in a way, I was underestimating him at the time.

I wasn't aware at that moment, but I must have spent a long time fiddling around with the broken golem. After feeling over the body, I turned my attention to the golem's torso. "The part I'm the most interested in would have to be her armor…"

It was a different color from her body and looked to be a piece of stone armor. It had probably been made from the same material as the naginata in her hands. The armor only covered the golem's torso, so it was essentially a breastplate.

This is probably what the introductory book meant when it talked about special stone armor used for combative golems, I thought. I should make some of this armor for Goltarou as well.

I was thinking of my anxiety when we were surrounded by monkeys and Goltarou was about to be bombarded. However, there was a glaring imbalance in protected areas here. Was a golem's weak point located in their chest?

The stone material used for the armor was much tougher than that of the body. How did the armor feel? *Yeesh, this woman's chest is huge.*

To confirm the armor's material, I leaned in close to peer at the golem's chest. At that moment, something of purest white cut the air between me and the golem.

It was, presumably, Goltarou. He was extremely wary of anything coming into contact with me. Even so, when he came between my face and the golem's chest, it didn't feel very forceful. Though he was stone, this motion somehow evoked soft silk.

Then, the kind and considerate Goltarou destroyed the golem's lower half with a single low kick.

"Wha—?! Wha… Gol?!" I gaped. A-a-are y-you a demon?! How could you kick a dead body?!

My eyes became teary as I turned on Goltarou to reprimand him. However, as soon as I did, I froze, my eyes wide at the vision in front of me.

An unbelievably beautiful Greek statue stood where I thought Goltarou would be. She was lovely enough to steal your breath away. Her body was white as snow and wrapped in smooth, silken stone. The combination of inorganic stone beauty and the graceful curves of a living creation could only be called a masterpiece. This, coupled with her transcendental features, amounted to a tremendous *presence*.

She was like an alabaster goddess who had suddenly descended from the heavens. The first detail that caught my attention were her entrancing eyes. The white of her sclera was the same pure white as the rest of her body. However, her irises looked to be made of red stone, like a polished, nigh translucent ruby.

The second detail: Both her ears were long. Was she what was known as an elf? The third: Her long hair flowed down her back and reached her waist. The fourth: Her chest, in comparison to the busty shrine golems, was slightly…lacking. No, as a gentleman, let me correct myself for her honor: I think she had a very elegant and refined chest.

Still, I don't want you to think I get excited looking at Greek statues or anything like that! It was just…this girl's beauty could have led an army of youths astray and ruined countless futures. She was probably unaware of her dangerous allure. How sinful.

At that moment, I noticed a final critically important detail: This girl had the same pattern on her forehead as my Goltarou. What did that mean…? Then, did that make… In other words, this golem…

Was Goltarou's little sister?

Nice to meet you, little sister, I thought. I'm your brother's best friend. Do you perhaps know where he went?

The second I locked eyes with this silent sister, I sensed a sudden burst of emotion from behind—a sharp bloodthirst that made me feel like I had been stabbed in the back with ice. In my surprise, I quickly turned. And gasped.

There stood the origin of the bloodthirst. The Greek statues—no, the shrine golems—numbered six. They rushed in from the entrance and surrounded the interior of the shrine. Each held that unique weapon.

S-six, you say…? I thought. Were there that many of them when we arrived?

The golems' eyes flashed with a poison-green light. That peaceful feeling from before had completely disappeared. These women now saw us as targets for elimination.

The sudden appearance of Goltarou's sister, combined with the guardians of the shrine burning with rage, meant that a completely meaningless battle was about to begin.

Chapter 12:
Barbarian Queen's Rampage

LET'S START FROM the beginning. The shrine golems were probably super strong. However, Goltarou's…uh, sister? She was *too* strong.

The six golems stood on the entrance side of the expansive stone hall. On the other side stood Goltarou's sister and me. Besides me, everyone else was like unto a Greek statue. Visually speaking, I stuck out. Although if everyone were to line up, the whiteness of Goltarou's sister was strikingly purer than that of the other Greek statues, so in a sense she also stuck out.

No, wait, I thought frantically. Calm down. Now's not the time for such rabbit holes.

The blades of the Greek statues' naginatas were directed straight toward us, a clear sign of hostility. Well, their anger was reasonable. After all, Goltarou's sister had just destroyed the lower half of their comrade with a low kick. If our positions were reversed, I was sure I would've been pissed.

Twelve green eyes stabbed into us with their gaze. Opposite, Goltarou's sister's two ruby eyes weren't the least bit fazed. The tension between the two parties swelled, growing increasingly volatile.

At that, Goltarou's sister stepped in front of me. A protective move, and the spitting image of the reliable Goltarou. As expected of blood relatives.

In a single bound, his sister suddenly jumped more than ten meters forward. She landed quietly in the center of the shrine. In her slender right hand was one of the arms of the headless golem. She had ripped it off.

Eh? I blinked. Wait, ripped off?! That?! When?!

Goltarou's sister raised the golem's arm high above her head and threw it straight to the floor. There, she stomped on it with all her might. It shattered. Shards of golem arm flew through the air.

After kicking away the remains, Goltarou's sister stood tall and imposing, her ruby eyes filled with provocation. The six shrine golems responded in unison—rushing her, and ignoring me.

No way, I gaped. Did she provoke them to divert enemy attention away from me? How considerate. Again, as expected of the blood relative of the attentive gentleman, Goltarou. Ah, but then again, I think she was the one who started this fight…

Of the six enemy golems, the two in front threw themselves at Goltarou's sister. They were fast, and their pace was perfectly synced as they dashed in from either side and simultaneously swung their naginatas.

Those heavy-looking weapons moved so lightly in their hands. Their slices were swift and aimed directly at Goltarou's sister's neck. Two heavy blades crossed upon that slender, unprotected throat.

I thought for a horrible moment that her head had been cut clean off. But somehow, her narrow neck stopped both blades. They left not a single scratch on her lovely skin.

What demonic defense…

In a couple of sudden, precise movements, Goltarou's sister seized the heads of the two golems, one in each hand. The golems struggled, but they couldn't escape. The difference in power was too great.

Wow, this girl's lifting her enemies in a clawhold.

Goltarou's sister smashed her captured victims to the floor with all her strength. The sound of their destruction echoed throughout the shrine.

When the rumble faded, Goltarou's sister silently stood up. The downed golems didn't even twitch. Their heads had been pulverized. Even though Goltarou's little sister looked like a pure elf goddess, she fought like a peerless gorilla god who reveled in flaunting her power.

The remaining four golems charged Goltarou's sister like an avalanche. They whirled their naginatas in a hurricane of steel.

It was an absolutely crazed attack. If Goltarou's sister hadn't drawn the enemies away and I was caught in the middle of that raging blade storm, I would've been meat-grindered into oblivion.

As I gaped, I noticed the enemy golems often aimed at the area from her neck up. At times, Goltarou's sister would brace for the attack, and at others she would dodge. I had been shocked to my bones when her neck stopped those initial blades, but was her defense truly impervious…?

I desperately wracked my brain, trying to come up with a way to free Goltarou's sister from this storm.

Right! If I used *NTR*, maybe I could control the shrine golems like I did the monkeys' flying rugby balls.

NTR had first destroyed the timer mechanism on the Grand Stone Gate. Next, it had dealt with the binding on the stone book, which had probably been some kind of barrier spell. And lastly, it let me control the monkeys' stone bullets. In each of these three instances, the target was dyed a black color to indicate that *NTR* had been activated.

Logically speaking, any being created by spells—which I knew golems were, seeing as they were very much the domain of the Earth attribute—was vulnerable to my control. And if I could control these golems, we could escape.

I pointed my right hand toward one of the rabid shrine golems and shouted, *"NTR!"*

Nothing happened. The targeted golem continued to move as she had before. Her bloodthirst showed no sign of dulling.

I realized then that these golems also *felt* different than the previous targets of my *NTR*. It was a little like I'd tried to open a door without a doorknob; there was just nothing to latch onto. My command couldn't stick to the golem, and had been carried away by the wind. I was truly "praying to deaf ears."

Why was this happening? Weren't golems created via Earth spells?

"Ah…" Then I remembered. If I recalled correctly, *Introduction to Spellcrafting* had said, "Golems deflect interference from outside mana." That was why golems were advantageous in fights against spellcasters.

Are you kidding me…? Was it because of that? Was that why NTR didn't work on these golems? How could this be? I finally thought I was useful, yet here I am, once again reduced to a useless moocher…

My shoulders dropped at this cruel epiphany, but of course, the fight continued without me.

Goltarou's sister calmly continued to stave off her enemies' enraged assault. Then, as if she had been waiting for the perfect moment, she leaned her body slightly to the side. Her beautiful leg lashed out like a whip, unleashing a roundhouse kick.

With that, she literally beat her enemy hands down.

It was a single roundhouse kick, yet its bewildering speed and devastating force obliterated the heads of three of the four remaining enemy golems. I couldn't fathom the disproportionate power vested in the slenderness of that white leg. I could only stare in disbelief.

Having lost their heads, the Greek statues crumpled to the ground with a resounding crash, one after another. Goltarou's sister stood serene amid her collapsing enemies as if nothing had happened, still in her kicking pose.

Only one enemy remained: the fiend who had jumped out of the way of the roundhouse kick. It was the captain golem with the different-colored armor and weapon, who had stood right in the middle of the entrance. It was also the golem whose busty chest I'd peered at earlier.

At that moment, for some reason, Goltarou's sister turned to me. She jerked her shoulders slightly and fidgeted around.

Ah, this was the same gesture Goltarou performed whenever he wanted me to pay attention. It was equivalent to that light tugging on my sleeve. Because Goltarou was reserved with his selfishness, I made sure to never overlook these signs.

What do you want to show me, little sister? You know, there's still an enemy behind you.

What a laid-back gal. Ah, I had spoken too soon! The enemy golem brandished her naginata and aimed a surprise attack at Goltarou's sister's exposed back.

Yet she didn't seem to notice; she was still fidgeting and looking at me. This was bad. She'd be killed!

"Hey, idiot! Goltarou, behind you!"

Instantly, her ruby eyes glinted. In the next second, she released a flash of a back kick, eyes still trained on me, and easily shattered both of the enemy's legs.

She didn't even turn around… I thought hazily.

Legs destroyed, the busty golem lost her balance and fell backwards. Goltarou's sister gave me a tender look before slowly walking toward the enemy behind her.

The following onslaught was one-sided and relentless. Goltarou's sister straddled the enemy, ripped both her arms off, and drove brutal punch after punch into her head until it was no more. It was such an excessive beatdown that I had to wonder if she had some personal vendetta. There was nothing left of the captain golem except for that armored torso.

So, in the end, what had all that fidgeting been about? Did Goltarou's sister want to show off her ruthless fighting?

"But, damn. This is pretty bad…" As I took in the miserable state of the shrine, those words slipped out unconsciously.

Being the fight's referee, I confirmed the deaths of the shrine golems. I got the weird feeling that I had seen this happen before. The heads of each of the golems I checked were completely destroyed, and as you might expect, the golems were completely silent. It was an absolute victory for Goltarou's little sister.

Still, how strong… Compared to when he was a mannequin, Goltarou's flexibility and fighting capability had clearly increased.

Ah, no. What was I saying? This was Goltarou's little sister. She wasn't my partner.

Afterward, we ran away from the shrine. If I was discovered by the people in charge, I was sure I would be fined for all the damage. Or, more likely, I would be arrested for destruction of property.

I dragged my feet as we continued on the road. Goltarou's little sister carried the basket on her back, following just behind me.

Stop. Please stop... Even though he was missing now, that was my precious and adorable Goltarou's favorite spot to walk…

After a bit, Goltarou's sister and I decided to eat on top of a nearby hill. The desolate auburn land was the same as always, still barren of any flora, but settling down on the overlook gave us a surprisingly nice view.

At any rate, this world's vast sky was clear and beautiful. I watched the thin white clouds in the blue sky drift ever eastward.

Staring at that striking clarity far above my head, I absentmindedly said, "Come to think of it, all this time, the west wind's been blowing…"

When I returned my eyes to the ground, I saw Goltarou's sister lighting a fire. She was pretty good at it. She must have inherited the skill from her older brother. Then she sat next to me and warmed the cheese and bread as if she'd practiced it before. Finally, she gracefully presented me with my favorite dish: melted cheese on top of perfectly toasted bread.

I'm sorry, I thought absently. Since I've been leaving everything up to your brother, my ability to cook for myself has atrophied. I am a man who cannot live by himself.

I ate my meal in silence. After I finished the bread, Goltarou's sister took out a glorious cranberry-apple and the green knife from the bag. She cut the glorious cranberry-apple into elegant and refined slices. Her hands moved like this slicing was part of her everyday routine. Her delicate fingers handled the knife with incredible deftness and grace. At last she lined the slices on top of a small wooden plate and kindly presented them to me.

I put one slice of the glorious cranberry-apple into my mouth.

Aah, this is…

Goltarou cut a glorious cranberry-apple for me every day after meals as a dessert. In the beginning, his cuts were so exquisite that I felt bad eating them. However, as he observed my reactions and behavior during meals, he adjusted his cuts accordingly, and after a mere four days, he found the perfect cut for my sensibilities. By which I mean to say, the only one in this whole world who could pull off this exact cut was my partner.

At the same time, I remembered another fact. Right before we stopped by the shrine, I had Goltarou promise me: “If there are people or golems in the shrine, you cannot punch them.”

I knew Goltarou was a good guy who would keep any promise I asked of him. And, thinking back, the white golem sitting beside me didn’t punch the headless golem when she destroyed it. She *kicked* it.

Additionally, in the fight against the six golems that resulted from this initial desecration, she never hit them first, despite clearly possessing the ability to do so. She made sure to take a hit from each before she came at them. Which is to say, she waited until they attacked.

At this point, I wanted to cry. As long as I didn’t speak the words, I could run away from the truth. At the same time, I couldn’t bring myself to do that. I had to properly express my gratitude to the one who tried to do everything for me.

The moment I throw away my respect, I will no longer be a cultured gentleman.

“This is delicious. Thanks again…Goltarou.”

The snow-white Greek statue regarded me as sweetly as usual. Her body trembled in delight, but the tremor was so faint that only I could catch it. There could be no doubt now. She was Goltarou.

I wept. I had negligently turned my precious partner into a bishoujo figurine…

Chapter 13:
Blue Eyes and Long Ears

THE ROAD EXTENDED straight to the west. Wearing an excessively expensive-looking olive-brown robe, I walked through the auburn wasteland accompanied by my excessively beautiful partner.

The headwind brushed against my cheek. The usual scenery extended as far as the eye could see, but I thought we couldn't be that far away from our destination of Samari, and we would hopefully arrive that day.

Two and a half hours had passed since I took responsibility for turning Goltarou into a bishoujo figurine and cried tears of deep sorrow. My partner had turned into an elf golem too beautiful for this world, but I was not the Greek-statue fanatic or gentleman pervert she had mistaken me for.

In fact, I was starting to feel a bit reluctant to be seen by others with her in this form. Undoubtedly, anyone who saw her would fall in love with her. I, on the other hand, standing next to her, would be taken for some kind of obsessive figurine connoisseur…

Anyway, I had completely switched gears within those two and a half hours. The bond I shared with my partner had returned to normal.

See, I wasn't a man who judged anyone based on their appearance. I took pride in that. After all, I had thought those abominable monkeys were cute and friendly until I learned of their savagery. So there was no need to work myself up over this!

The resolution to my crisis had been right there in front of me. Even if Goltarou now physically resembled a bishoujo figurine, I would never ever abandon him—he was my partner. And if he turned into a statue of a macho bear because he mistook me for a gentleman with a fetish for burly muscle-men, nothing would change between us then either. No matter what form he took or what others said, he would always be my beloved, adorable, and compassionate Goltarou.

Still, calling my partner "Goltarou" in this form did feel strange. In her current shape, a girly name like Golko was insufficiently feminine. Maybe something like Wilhelmina or Margareta…though if I didn't give her a divine name like Aphrodite or Psyche, I might get scolded…

"Let's pick up the pace, Gol. I want to reach Samari before the sun sets."

Gol. That was the simplest I was going to allow, given my personality. I'd already called my partner "Gol" on several occasions in the heat of the moment. As such, there was no sense of discomfort. Besides, it was just a nickname. Her real name would always be "Goltarou."

Yeah. If someone asked me, "What's your golem's name?" I would unhesitatingly answer, "It's Goltarou." I refused to yield my pride in my christening skills.

To tell you the truth, I thought perhaps that if I didn't drastically change her name, Gol might grow tired of being a bishoujo figurine and return to his original form. I was crossing my fingers that, if such an opportunity arose, he would transform into that cool armored golem warrior I imagined when I made him.

I held little hope for that, though.

Now that I look back on all that happened after, no matter how many times I kindly begged, Gol firmly stuck with that bishoujo figurine form…

Returning to the moment, I said to Goltarou, "Let's reach Samari before sunset." I believed that was possible so long as nothing dramatic happened.

By calculating the time required to reach the road from the basin and the several days it took to reach the shrine after that, I had intuited the map's scale, especially with the help of the many geographical landmarks.

I wanted to pick up the pace because I was thinking about what would happen after we arrived. The later we got to the village, the more difficult it would be to negotiate lodging.

"If we make it tonight, I want to sleep under a roof…"

Ever since leaving the basin, we had slept outside. I originally planned to spend a night at the shrine, but because of that over-the-top battle, we were forced to escape.

I called out to Gol, so she popped her head over my shoulder to listen. This was her usual gesture, but with her new form, her long ears lightly brushed against mine. It tickled.

Her ears sure were long… I wondered if all this world's inhabitants were elves. Since I'd only met skeletons, I had no clue as to whether such ears were a common feature. Bones didn't really give you a good sense of ear-shape.

Ah, wait. When I thought about it, the Greek statues in the shrine all had normal ears. The goddesses on the high relief also had human ears. Then that meant this world *wasn't* populated solely by elves.

In that case, uh, what? Did that mean that from Gol's observations of my behavior, he didn't just decide that I must be a bishoujo figurine fanatic, but that I had an elf-ear fetish?! So in his never-ceasing attempts to better serve me, he took on this new form?

Tears of regret were once more about to fall from my eyes.

Then again, even someone who knows you well can end up misjudging appropriate gifts, especially if they're from a different species. Once, when I was bedridden with a cold, my pet cat was worried and dropped a dead sparrow on my pillow. To be frank, it was unpleasant… But I knew he was acting in a way he thought would please me. That was why I showed my cat the biggest smile I could muster.

In that case, there was only one thing I could do as a recipient of Gol's kindness. Besides, it wasn't like I was put out.

"Your long ears are cute," I said. "I like them."

I could not have imagined the impact those words had on Gol. I thought I was just expressing my gratitude with a compliment. I didn't put much thought into the statement. Rather, I didn't put *any* thought into it.

And yet, at that moment, a tremendous whirlwind of emotions slammed into me all at once. What was happening? What *was* this? The emotion surging through me like a torrent was an incandescent joy… No, it was close to ecstasy.

Since Gol's creation, it had been rare for such a strong emotion to flow into me from him. In fact, this was the first time any of his emotions had reached such intensity.

Her feelings continued flowing into my head like a deluge. They were as thick as flooding rapids mixed with mud, and as hot as a violent flame fanned by a harsh wind. I felt dizzy, and red and blue sparks flared behind my eyelids.

This was bad. I couldn't take any more of this. Hey, stop, Gol. My brain is melting. Ah, I can't. I can't…anymore…

As my consciousness faded, I saw a long-haired woman sitting on a large rock in the middle of a dense forest. The violet of twilight enshrouded her surroundings. Was that why she stood out so clearly? When she noticed me, it looked like she was desperately trying to call out to me. However, the noise from the wind was so loud that I couldn't hear anything…

When I woke, a pair of worried blue eyes peered at me. Hm? Blue eyes…?

I jerked to full awareness. It appeared that I had fainted on the road and Gol was bent over me. As always, Gol's face was very, very close. It seemed she had been taking care of pathetic ol' unconscious me. Also as always, she was a good gal.

Furthermore, Gol's eyes were, of course, red.

Whoa! From this close, I realized her eyelashes were incredibly long. How had those come about? No, I had to focus, stone eyelashes notwithstanding.

Though…I wondered who the owner of those blue eyes had been. And hey, why did I lose consciousness on the road in the first place?

There was only one thing that all these questions pointed to.

Yup, in short, after the series of increasingly stressful events stemming from the sudden change in my environment, my mental state had reached peak exhaustion. I needed a break.

In order to rest in safety as soon as possible, I hurried us along to our destination of Samari. Because I had collapsed, we were behind schedule, and the sun would set soon.

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"Is this…Samari? No way…" I was speechless.

Right before sunset, we made it to a settlement I believed to be Samari. To be more exact, we made it to the settlement's ruins.

The settlement of Samari consisted of about a hundred wooden houses, all lined up. It gave off the impression of an old-fashioned farming village. But there were no people, only abandoned houses, and a wide flatland over yonder that must have been a field.

I walked through several buildings, but as expected, they were all uninhabited. There were a few pieces of furniture left inside, but only a very few. Unlike Luvel Zairein's hideout in the basin, it appeared that most of the furniture had been removed from these houses. Did the whole town move?

Walking between the houses made me feel like I had wandered into an old western film. To tell you the truth, this wasn't a completely unexpected turn of events. I'd thought it was strange that I hadn't encountered a single soul on the road. And above all else, the monkeys were troublingly strong. The ones nearby were the huge gorilla-sized variety, the kind that could easily kill a normal human.

I definitely wouldn't have made it this far without my partner, Gol. After all, my arsenal consisted solely of *NTR*, which was completely useless against physical attacks, and *Create Pebble*, which was only capable of creating uselessly large rocks. Without Gol, I would have been monkey food a long time ago.

I was having doubts that I was actually the "Sorcerer King of Destruction." Rather, I was starting to think my profession was more like the "Sorcerer King, Golem Moocher."

Great, now I was depressed on top of feeling spineless.

Although I had expected this to a degree, actually seeing the settlement uninhabited really hurt.

However, switching gears was, as ever, one of my strong suits. I readjusted my thinking and decided it was time to find a minimally damaged empty house where we could spend the night. And anyway, if I remembered correctly, we would encounter another settlement, maybe even a large city, if we continued farther west.

I decided to adjust the plan and look over the map again. Since I now knew the map's scale, I could calculate exactly how many days it would be until our next destination. Fortunately, we also still had plenty of supplies.

"Gol, let's borrow an empty house nearby and eat…" I called out and turned to my partner—but she was looking past my shoulder.

She got like this whenever she discovered something unexpected or was on the alert. It was easy to tell when Gol was in hypervigilance mode. As long as she didn't need to look elsewhere, her eyes were glued to me. So, if she wasn't facing in my direction, she was inevitably looking at something that felt off.

And these past few days, Gol had only turned away from me to focus on a monkey hiding in a blind spot.

I readied myself. The sun would soon set completely and the area was dim. This would be the first time a monkey came upon us so late in the day.

They normally appeared on the road up till sunset, when they would return to their burrows to escape the cold.

Slightly wary, I looked in the direction of Gol's attention. There were no monkeys.

"That's…"

I couldn't believe it. Up ahead was a house with a light in the window.

No…it couldn't be. I would've seen it before. No, wait—I realized now that the sun had set, which meant it was way easier to actually *see* the lights. As I suppressed my excitement, I approached the illuminated house.

I checked myself in front of the entrance. This could be my first contact with someone from another world. First impressions were important. After all, I didn't have the best looks out there. I lightly fixed my hair and brushed the dust off my clothes.

All right, I should be good now, I thought. As for Gol…

"Well, you don't look as unappealing as I do, so you should be fine," I said. Just in case, I fixed her hair slightly. Truthfully, there was no need, but since she obediently presented her head to me, I went along with it.

When I brushed her long, silky hair to the side, I saw the crest on her forehead. *I'm glad this didn't change, at least… Still, what exactly is your hair made of?*

No, no distractions. I had to focus on a more important matter.

I took a deep breath in front of the door. To be frank, it took a lot of courage for me to even stand there. According to my past experiences with this world, it was highly likely that past this door, I would encounter a skeleton. After all, in this world, illumination didn't necessarily equate to living people. In fact, in all my experiences thus far, illuminated places had a one hundred percent chance of being inhabited by a skeleton.

I resolved myself and knocked on the door. The thuds of my fist on the hard, wooden door echoed in the empty settlement.

I was met, yet again, with silence.

As expected, another skeleton.

But just as I thought that, the door opened, and a face appeared in the gap. "Yes, yes. Who is it?"

Whoa! It wasn't a skeleton, but a living, breathing human! Specifically, it was a thin man wearing round glasses.

This was the first living human I encountered in this other world. It wasn't a maiden or a beauty—it was an exhausted middle-aged man.

Chapter 14:
Fake Real Name

"OH MY...! I didn't think I would meet anyone else in a place like this." The bespectacled man opened the door wider, a pleasant smile on his face.

He seemed like a good fellow. He wore a large, turquoise crystal earring in his right ear, and his facial features were attractive, going by the structure of his nose bridge, but his hair was disheveled and his clothes wrinkled. It was quite a shame, but I could only describe this middle-aged man as, well, a little pathetic.

He was also clearly not Japanese, but at the same time, he didn't have elf ears. Just the same regular human ears I did. He regarded me with a serene expression and squinted a bit, but as soon as he shifted his line of sight behind me to Gol, he looked stunned, his eyes wide and mouth agape.

Then he gulped and remained silent for some time. But soon after, he cleared his throat and recovered that gentle smile.

"Well, let's not stand here talking. Come now. Come in." The man was about to generously show us around the house when he suddenly let out an embarrassed laugh. "Though I'm only borrowing this space tonight. I'm not the homeowner."

We followed him through the wooden door and into the open space with a fireplace. Because there was no strange furniture left, it looked like any old simple wooden house. We entered the room and sat down on the floor in front of the fireplace.

The man opened his mouth with an exhausted sigh. "I didn't think the mutant Earth Goblins had grown so prevalent… I'm in this sorry state because of them, despite my precautions." His clothes were torn in a number of places. Even his quality glasses were partially cracked.

Hey, hey… Looking closely, I noticed a large bloodstain on his shirt around his abdomen. *Y-you all right, mister?*

His awful appearance and exhausted face made him look like a battered middle-aged man, but in the firelight, I thought he might actually be a bit younger than I initially took him for.

Hm…? Wait a minute, Earth Goblin? What was that? I'd only seen monkeys along the way. Although my mind was buzzing with questions, something more important was giving me a little panic. *I-I should a-also say something…*

Incidentally, I had by this time realized that not only could I read this world's language, I could have a conversation without issue. I figured this out when I listened to myself talking to Gol and noticed that every single word coming out of my mouth was unfamiliar.

Therefore, I didn't think I'd have any problems with communication. Furthermore, the first person I'd met in this world seemed intelligent and

friendly, the type of person I could easily chat with. However, I'd only ever met skeletons so far, so I was unprepared to speak to a living denizen of this world.

I'll be frank here and say that I was like a youth who had developed a communication disorder and was only able to talk to himself.

I used everything I had to desperately push these words out of my throat: "I see. How lamentable…"

Hey, what do you mean, "lamentable"?! Those are my first words?! I know that I can come up with a more sensible way to express my feelings!

I quickly regretted my statement, but the man grasped my desire to continue the conversation and looked more relaxed. His smile grew even brighter.

What a dazzling smile. If I were a girl who liked older men, this would be the scene when I fell into a forbidden love.

"I apologize for the late introduction," he said. "My name is Semau Speria. I am, more or less, an assistant professor at the Imperial Spellcaster Academy. Nice to meet you."

This man's intellectual appearance hinted at the wisdom he no doubt held in his head. Moreover, he was a noble and sensible gentleman who kindly introduced himself first, despite the difference in our social standings, after seeing how inept I was at communicating.

A cultured aura absolutely rolled off the man named Speria. In that case, I had to show my gratitude as a representative of another culture. "I also apologize for not introducing myself sooner." I said. "My name is…"

I froze.

I didn't know my name.

This was the true horror of my memory loss. Unless I was conscious of it, it didn't bother me. But now, I panicked. I was flustered.

I didn't have enough knowledge of this world to come up with a fake name. Of the names I knew, Luvel Zairein was the only one confirmed to be male. There were numerous indications as to his gender, but the really definitive one was his attire. All the clothes in my possession—besides my lame pajamas—were originally Zairein's. His clothes were clearly menswear, and their shape fit me.

But as an author with a prolific career, Zairein was most likely a famous person. Besides, even if I deployed his name as a fake, my pride wouldn't let me be openly associated with that bastard.

Given all that, what could I do? I didn't know my own name, or even my surname. I had nothing to provide any hints to my previous existence. My fingers stiffened in panic on my kit bag. The only remnant of my original world were the lame pajamas stowed within.

Those yellow cats…no, they were tanuki, right? Anyway, was there nothing left to prove my past existence besides the irredeemably lame pajamas with those mysterious and perplexing yellow animals printed on them?

What exactly was my identity…?

Tears built in my eyes and my fist trembled.

But at that moment, I flipped my thinking. Quickly switching gears was, after all, my strong suit.

I would approach this from the opposite direction. Instead of thinking that I had nothing left but for my pajamas, I could say that my pajamas *remained*.

I couldn't imagine anyone purposefully wearing these insanely lame pajamas. Even I didn't want to be seen wearing them in front of others. Therefore, I must have bought them in a momentary fit of insanity. As such, couldn't these lame pajamas be considered indicative of a trait of mine?

Let me be clear. At that moment, I was pretty desperate.

I slowly raised my head. With a straight back and dignity in my voice, I said, "My name is Nemaki Dasai."

In other words—specifically, in Japanese ones—you could call me Pajamas. Lame Pajamas.

As I introduced myself, I looked the man directly in the face with clear and unwavering eyes. I spoke brazenly and boldly. This was what you would call a bluff.

I felt Gol's zealous gaze on my back. Ah, yeah, she was a fervent believer in my amazing naming sense.

"Nemaki, is it?" said Mister Speria. "However, 'Dasai' is… I haven't heard of such a name around here."

What?! "Nemaki" was the safe one?!

At any rate, it appeared that the name order in this world was personal name followed by surname. When I introduced myself, I actually did so in the Japanese order: Dasai Nemaki. It was plausibly a name like Tasai Nemaki, which I knew someone in my world was likely to actually have. However, when the words left my mouth, the order was automatically reversed into this world's standard.

Mister Speria looked like he was thinking of something as he stared at me. Afterward, he glanced at Gol behind me and gave a quick nod. "I see. You've come from the east, right…? Seeing as how you're accompanied by such a shrine golem, I'm sure your circumstances must be complicated. Let me guess…"

H-he was going to guess…

I'd stirred the hornet's nest. I had no choice but to try and match his guesses with an appropriate story.

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From what I gathered from Mister Speria's extended guess, there had been an ongoing war amongst the smaller nations to the east for quite some time. He believed me to be a member of a spellcaster family who was driven out of their country after losing a battle. Throughout the story, I added little agreements like, "Yes, that's right."

I was a bit worried that I was agreeing to unusual details, but Mister Speria didn't seem suspicious of me. Besides, I think he was only trying to chat. He didn't try to pry into my personal history.

"Still, how can I put it…? Your golem's amazing, Nemaki. I'm no expert, but I can tell from a simple glance that it's not the average sort."

It seemed he was more interested in Gol than my origins. I supposed that was to be expected. She was clearly the superior specimen.

"Thank you very much," I said. "She's my incredible partner. Her name is Goltarou." I introduced her with her real name. That's just the basics.

For a moment, Mister Speria looked like he was deep in thought. I understood the man's confusion. A name like "Goltarou" didn't seem to have any ready connection to her current form as a beautiful elf-goddess statue.

Or, wait, maybe this reaction *wasn't* one of a person caught up in strange naming practices… Then what was it?

Mister Speria's expression returned to his usual gentle one. "Goretaru, huh…? The name of the war goddess known as the Barbarian Queen. A truly splendid name."

Eh? No, it's Goltarou! But I had now realized my error. To the people of this world, when I said "Goltarou," it probably sounded like "Goretaru."

It seemed whenever I spoke, my pronunciation was altered to sound more natural in this world. There were even times when my pronunciation of proper nouns, like people's names, would be changed from my intended accent. In other words, "Momotarou" would be "Momotaru."

However, I was proud of the name "Goltarou" that I had worked so hard to come up with. From then, I made sure to emphasize and articulate the proper syllables as much as possible.

"Yes, my *Goltarou* is valiant and reliable. A true war goddess. Without her, I certainly would not have been able to make it this far."

Mister Speria nodded, agreeing with me. Oh, did it work? "Mana beasts like Earth Goblins are the natural enemies of we spellcasters. You don't look like that much of a warrior, so I figured there must have been some secret to your Goretaru."

No good. It didn't work... But I wasn't someone who could easily give up. "My *Goltarou* is truly peerless. A peerless goddess. I can't even imagine her losing."

Each time I complimented her, Gol swayed back and forth, sticking closer to me. However, that didn't matter. I was in the middle of a serious battle, waging my pride as the one who gave her that name.

"Ha ha ha! How impressive! But… Hmph, I see. I've heard that among the shrine golems that weren't created as entertainment for aristocrats, there are some highly capable individuals. Your Goretaru must be one of them."

Was it no good? Why did he still have to say “Goretaru?” No, not yet. My heart had yet to break. “Heh, it’s more like *Goltarou* is too strong. In fact, I’m starting to feel like *Goltarou’s* moocher.”

Gol continued to snuggle her body, which for some reason felt wrapped in warmth as she cuddled closer to my back. But none of that mattered to me now.

“No need to be so modest. The actual strength of an active golem is that of the caster. If Goretaru’s abilities are that amazing, it just proves how skillful you are.”

Why? Why was it…? Was it impossible to share my wonderful naming sense with the people of this world?

“Thank you very much… I’m sure Go…retaru is happy…to receive such praise…”

My heart finally broke.

The warm fire crackled in the fireplace as I shared a meal with Mister Speria. Just like an experienced traveler, he was much better prepared with his equipment and food than I, who just threw preserved rations into a primitive basket for Gol to carry on her back.

Mister Speria shared with me something that resembled pickled cabbage. The taste wasn't bad. As thanks, I offered some cheese. He was pleased, and said it was delicious.

By the way, Mister Speria easily lit the wood in the fireplace with a Fire spell. It happened in a moment, much faster than Gol could ever make one. As the Earth attribute's representative, I was laid low by the loss.

However, he stared wide-eyed at how Gol valiantly helped to prepare my meal.

W-we won against the Fire attribute!

Though if this were a battle, it would end in a tie.

I relished this long-awaited opportunity to enjoy a meal with someone to talk to. The two of us sipped on a fruit wine Mister Speria had brought as we conversed. From this exchange, I learned that he had left the imperial capital alone to investigate the Earth miasma spreading throughout the land. However, the situation was much worse than he expected, so he had determined that continuing the investigation would be impossible. He intended to return to the city the next day.

Oho! Wasn't this some convenient timing?

I asked, "Um, would you mind if I accompanied you on your journey? After all, I'm not familiar with this land. The map in my possession is old."

Mister Speria agreed to my proposal with an easygoing tone. "Ah, of course, it's fine. In fact, I'd be honored to have such an outstanding bodyguard who managed to get this far unscathed."

And just like that, I added a friendly partner to my journey. What's more, the fruit wine was quite delicious. I wondered what kind of fruit it was made from.

By the time I realized it, it was already late into the night. Murky darkness covered the world outside the small window in the room.

Mister Speria spoke as he put away the wine bottle. "Then, Nemaki-kun, we should go to sleep soon. It's dangerous around these parts if you don't wake up before sunrise."

I think he was talking about the threat of monkeys, since they became active during the day. Oversleeping and getting assaulted by those damn monkeys would be asking for death.

However, I had Gol's mysterious radar to protect me. During the last few days on the road, I'd been careless and slept in. Would I be able to wake up early enough tomorrow? I was a little uneasy about that.

By then, Mister Speria had prepared his sleeping bag in the corner of the room and fallen asleep. I wrapped myself in a blanket on the other side of the fireplace. Gol sat next to me, ready to hold me in her arms as usual.

"Thanks, Gol. But it's warm here, so no need."

All in all, this room was pretty toasty thanks to the fireplace. Since my partner was kind, she was probably still concerned about me catching a cold if I slept on the floor. But I was fine. As long as I was sleeping inside, there was no need to bother her to sleep together.

Rest easy, I thought to her. Tonight, I will not be the feeble spoiled child who can't sleep unless it's in the warm embrace of his gentle knight.

Well, if I was speaking truthfully, I was a bit embarrassed to be an adult sleeping like a baby in someone's arms, at least in front of others. However, Gol froze for a few seconds at my reluctance. Then she shot a killing glare cold enough to freeze the air at the sleeping Speria's back.

This was bad, though I didn't know *what* specifically was bad. Although my thoughtful partner was releasing this inexplicable bloodlust, I didn't believe my considerate Gol would do anything horrible to someone else. The reason for the fight in the shrine was because my partner mistook my actions as perverted and had a small panic attack from all the stress. It was clear that everything was my fault. Gol would never do such a reckless thing.

But for some reason, I foresaw disaster happening under cover of night if I went to sleep without her. I couldn't think of what I should do. Because so much had happened that day, I was completely exhausted. So, just like how I would grab a mischievous dog's scruff, I firmly gripped Gol's wrist. Gol's boiling bloodlust slowly dulled.

Relieved, I surrendered to my fatigue, consciousness fading. My hand holding Gol's wrist relaxed and fell on top of hers. At the same time, Gol began to intertwine her fingers with mine.

I knew this kind of hand-holding had a name, but…when I tried to think of it, my mind faded into sleep.

Chapter 15:
Goblin and Earring

THE BEAUTIFUL, SNOW-WHITE Greek statue raised her lithe right leg over her head. The sight was exquisite enough to make angels weep. She was like unto a ballerina as her graceful foot slammed down onto the head of an enormous monkey.

Gol's simple yet picturesque axe kick left a crater in the monkey's skull. Blood sprayed and bone shards scattered through the air like a firework. The remains of the monkey's obliterated head were buried in the ground. Another splendid fatal attack.

I'd confirmed my suspicion that the farther west we went, the larger the monkeys became. The beasts in this area were particularly huge; they were large enough to make any boss gorilla envious. But, obviously, they were still no match for Gol.

I had also realized something else. That morning, I complimented Gol when she happened to pull off an especially magnificent axe kick. Ever since, Gol had relied solely on that same axe kick to dispatch her enemies.

But balance in all things is important; I needed to find a way to praise her other techniques.

"Your Goretaru really is astounding, Nemaki. I didn't grasp its true sophistication…" Mister Speria said as he adjusted his drooping glasses. "I never imagined I would be able to travel so easily down a road infested with Earth Goblins. And here I thought you were using your golem's *Surface Detection* to avoid contact with the creatures as you traveled…"

Right, "Earth Goblin" was the official name for these monkeys. I'd thought they were Japanese macaques clad in stones, but to think they were actually goblins… Well, I'd already given up thinking too hard about their strangeness. If Mister Speria called them goblins, then that was what they were.

However, ladies and gentlemen, if you would lend me your ears for a moment: Goblins resembled humans, in as much as they were fellow vertebrates. Monkeys were also vertebrates, so wouldn't that classify goblins as a type of monkey if they were to appear in my original world? That meant that goblins were monkeys, yes? For that reason, I shall continue referring to these creatures as "monkeys."

I still had a puzzled look, so Mister Speria kindly explained further. I appreciated his unerring professionalism. "In terms of extermination, Earth Goblins are unmistakably the most difficult to handle of all mana beasts. The stones that cover their bodies deflect spells, and as such, spellcasters are wholly unable to affect them. On top of that, the sorcery at an Earth Goblin's disposal includes the troublesome *Stone Bullet*. Even golems, which are usually excellent protectors against mana-beast spells, fall short in this case. *Stone Bullet* weaponizes physical mass, and can easily pierce

the armor of a light-class golem. If surrounded, even a military-grade, heavy-class golem would be helpless in the face of a saturation attack."

As he was explaining, his eyes drifted toward Gol. "But all the Earth Goblins' advantages come to nothing when your Goretaru's detection ability, speed, and exceptionally powerful physical attacks hit them first."

Well, I'd already known of Gol's amazing capabilities. But from Mister Speria's overview, it seemed that those Greek statues back in the shrine had been quite strong. They had hunted all those monkeys, after all.

Hm? Wait. Just now, Speria used an interesting word, I thought. Sorcery…?

Weren't the monkeys using normal spells to make the rocks fly through the air? Actually, I'd kind of completely forgotten this, but was that "sorcery" he mentioned related to my title in this world: "Sorcerer King of Destruction"?

"What exactly is sorcery…?" I asked. "How is it different from normal spells?"

"Sorcery is the manipulation of mana, and can only be used by mana beasts. For them, it is an innate quality, and it allows them to exert control over an item created by other spells," Mister Speria said with a smile. "As you know, once we humans create objects with spells, we can no longer control them. For example, once a *Fireball* or *Wind Blade* is fired, we can't guide its trajectory. This is especially true for Earth spells. A rock generated by spellcraft remains at the site of its creation. Quite inconvenient, really."

Urgh…! How frustrating! But I can't deny it!

"Mana beasts, on the other hand, possess an organ known as a 'sorcery core.' By utilizing this core, they can manipulate an object after its creation. This is what makes them mana beasts."

"I see… So the way they fly their rocks through the air is otherwise impossible for Earth spells?"

"Correct. In the end, compared to the spells humans can wield, sorcery's threat level varies more greatly across attributes. If a mana beast has access to attributes that produce physical mass, such as Earth or Ice, it becomes capable of penetrating defensive spells, making it quite terrifyingly dangerous."

At the end of his explanation, Speria turned to face me. Then he slapped my shoulder with a laugh, as if he were teasing a bad student. "Ah, Nemaki, I can't believe you sometimes. Even though you wield such an incredible golem, you're utterly clueless about mana beasts! Ha ha, you must really be a pampered son."

I was ashamed. My knowledge was probably at the level of an elementary school student in this world.

Still, "sorcery," huh? I was able to make those rocks swish through the air like the monkeys, so was *NTR* sorcery?

Huh. Come to think of it… Because Gol had been so eager to show off her axe kicks this morning, she was killing every monkey in sight, which left none for me to sweep up with *NTR*.

In the meantime, I could bring any questions to my new teacher, Speria. “Um, are no other living creatures besides mana beasts able to use sorcery?”

“Hm, I haven’t heard of any precedents.” He thought for a moment before continuing. “Except for mana beasts…probably only the ‘Sorcerer King’ of legend. Though, it’s hard to say whether he’s real.”

Sorcerer King! He answered my question with some damning words.

Are you serious? You know about that, Great Teacher Speria?!

Just as I was about to ask more questions, a giant brown figure leapt down from the cliff in front of us and landed with a heavy boom. It was a hulking monkey the size of a boss gorilla. It was also relatively close to us.

I looked over to Gol. Although she moved to her protective position in front of me, she didn’t show any signs of charging. Instead, she glanced at me. Ah! She had allowed this lone monkey to approach to give me a chance to play around with *NTR*. How considerate.

Come to think of it, I’d been neglecting her as I talked with Mister Speria. She must have felt lonely and was now trying her best to catch my attention. She really was bad at asserting herself.

But what should I do? According to Mister Speria’s lecture, *NTR* was, without a doubt, something only the Sorcerer King could pull off. Could I get away with deploying it in front of him? I knew Gol was being considerate, but I suspected I should let her defeat it the same way as usual.

I hesitated as the hulking monkey continued to approach. It was so close and so large that I could make out every individual stone covering its body.

“So, those stones can deflect spells, huh…?” I said. “They look like normal rocks to me though.”

“The theory underlying Earth Goblin defense is exactly that which defines golems,” said Mister Speria. “Right, seeing is believing. Let me demonstrate.”

With that, Mister Speria took a step forward and casually raised his right hand toward the approaching monkey. The monkey showed no concern at this action and kept coming straight for us.

When the monkey was close enough, Mister Speria began his chant. “Well then, here I go. *Fireball*!”

A ball of fire the size of a softball shot out from his palm at high speed. It was terribly showy and incredibly protagonist-like. So frustrating!

The burning fireball slammed right into the monkey’s chest. However, on impact, the ball of fire dispersed and disappeared. That seemed strange.

“So, as you see, the mana flowing within the stones deflects mana that comes into contact with them, then disperses and returns the external mana

to a particle state," Mister Speria explained. He looked just like a patient science teacher.

Though cloaked in a heat haze from the fireball, the large monkey continued its inexorable approach.

"As expected, when the mutants grow to this size, even intermediate spells can't scratch them…" Mister Speria murmured.

Indeed, even though this boss gorilla had faced a scorching ball of fire, it was completely unscathed. Huh, so it was true that spells were completely ineffective.

I also hadn't missed that Mister Speria waited for the monkey to get closer before casting his spell. Did that mean spells had a surprisingly short firing range?

As I was mulling over the elements of spellcraft revealed by this demonstration, Mister Speria turned to me, a bit embarrassed. "Um, Nemaki. As you can see, my spells just aren't reliable at the moment. I'm sorry, but do you think you could defeat that mutant Earth Goblin?"

"Ah, right! Sorry, I got lost in thought."

I had forgotten that as the student in this scenario, I was in charge of cleaning up after the experiment. And it seemed the monkey was fairly pissed about being hit by that Fire spell. It reared up and bared its fangs, looking like it would jump us at any moment.

Ah. Bad.

"Gol, would you take care of that monkey for me?"

At my request, Gol pelted forward, like a bloodthirsty hound dog let loose on its prey. The graceful white goddess released a merciless axe kick. The monkey's head exploded into yet another inglorious firework.

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"Look, Nemaki. That's the Earth miasma. It's condensed enough to be visible." Mister Speria pointed at the land in front of us. A faint brown fog covered the road ahead.

Ah, so that was the Earth miasma. If Mister Speria hadn't been kind enough to explain it to me, I would've thought it was a sandstorm and wasted energy trying to go around it.

He continued: "The miasma does not directly harm the human body, but it *will* generate an outbreak of mutant mana beasts. It will also alter the soil quality, preventing any crops from growing…and if any land is engulfed by this miasma, it becomes uninhabitable."

Whoa, the Earth miasma was bad news…though it looked so unremarkable.

"However, an outbreak of miasma in this area is unprecedented, so there's undoubtedly something abnormal about it."

That was the reason Mister Speria had undertaken a dangerous journey to investigate this place. *What magnificent fortitude*, I thought. *As expected of a model man of culture*.

Being a representative of cultured men from my original world, I was about to express my respect to this upstanding compatriot when I noticed several shadows within the miasma. On closer inspection, I saw buildings in ruins. Unfortunately, the sun would set soon, so I supposed we would be staying there overnight.

As expected, it was an uninhabited settlement. Well, this statement is obvious, but the size of the monkeys in this region was flat-out dangerous. No matter how you looked at it, we were in a situation beyond any normal person's capacity to handle. Small wonder the residents had cleared out.

"This place was also swallowed by the miasma…" Mister Speria murmured with a troubled look.

Huh? Hadn't he passed through here to get to Samari? Gol and I had come from the east and headed west along the road, and all that time, we'd never encountered another settlement, nor had we strayed off the path. I had assumed Mister Speria took the same road but from the opposite direction: west to east.

"Speria, how exactly did you reach Samari?"

Mister Speria pointed to the turquoise earring in his right ear. "I used this. It helped me come up from the south."

"You *used* that earring?" It was quite large. I thought it might be malachite. Did it hold some special function?

"Well, observe." Mister Speria faced the settlement and began to chant. The crystal portion of his earring released faint particles of light. After a few seconds, a gentle breeze stirred around him until it blew past us. His eyes remained closed for a bit, but when he slowly opened them, he nodded. "Yup, it's safe. There are no more Earth Goblins in the vicinity. The one Goretaru just defeated must have been the last."

According to Mister Speria, his crystal earring was known as a mana tool. This one enhanced Wind spells and allowed him to perform an advanced scan of the area. It was what you might call his special move. He had used this detection spell to evade the monkeys as he zigzagged through the mountains, heading north to reach Samari.

The map had indeed indicated a number of settlements to the south. However, because they were distant and would have required crossing mountains, I hadn't considered them viable destinations.

Had Mister Speria really traveled all the way from there—by himself, no less—just to avoid the monkeys? Those steep mountains had no roads, as far as I could tell. We were so different… I had only gotten anywhere by being carried in Gol's arms. I couldn't hope to match Speria's work ethic.

"This mana tool actually came in a pair," Mister Speria said. "However, I seem to have dropped the other somewhere. I probably lost it when I was running away from the Earth Goblins after they finally caught me."

He let out a flustered laugh as he scratched his head. “I’m afraid that’s why this spell seems so impotent. It’s genuinely a lifesaver to have been able to join you for this leg of the journey.”

Mister Speria had experienced such troubles, and all to pursue the noble goal of scientific research. I was glad to offer him any help I could.

Well, I was really offering Gol’s help, but let’s not get back into my dreadful mooching.

Together, we chose an empty house and settled down to spend the night. Dinner was a group effort comprised of our collective ingredients: soup.

We threw in generous amounts of whatever was in Mister Speria’s shoulder bag, including some vegetables that resembled onions and others that looked like chickpeas. Likely on account of ending his journey earlier than expected, Mister Speria wasn’t being frugal with his rations. I also tossed a bunch of jerky into the pot. Finally, we sprinkled in some of the spices Mister Speria had on him.

What a lovely aroma…

After the ingredients softened in our stew, I ate together with my new companion.

Yup, not bad at all. With the jerky, we’d created an excellent soup stock. In other words, jerky soup. Ah, that vegetable really does taste like a normal onion. How delicious.

After all the distance we’d covered that day, the saltiness of the jerky seeped into my body, granting it another satisfying layer of flavor.

Incidentally, the water we used to make the soup was created by Mister Speria’s Water spell. He really was resourceful. I was envious of his Water spells, though. Unlike spell-created stones that instantly turned into dirt, spell-created water remained water. You could drink it and everything. Amazing, right?

It appeared that spells of the Water attribute were powerful tools when used by those with the appropriate aptitude. Although Water spells utilized physical mass like the Ice and Earth attributes, they didn’t quite create individual items, but rather manipulated their flow. In that way, Water resembled attributes like Fire or Wind, which could determine the initial vector of an object before its creation.

In short, if you were skilled enough, you could shoot water like a water gun or even control the flow of a river. There were even records of a great spellcaster in the past using a Water spell to sink an entire castle. Additionally, eighty percent of healing spells were of the Water attribute.

Yet this amazing attribute wasn’t included among the Four Cornerstones: Fire, Wind, Earth, and Ice. That meant, to the layperson, the Water attribute was even less worthy than the scum-level Earth attribute, and it was especially belittled in comparison to the similar Ice attribute, which could freeze water droplets in the atmosphere.

“For some reason, it feels unfair…” I muttered.

Mister Speria could even refill the water in my ceramic pot. There was a functioning well in the ruined settlement, but since the water might have been turned foul by the miasma, I thought it best to avoid drinking from it. It might upset my stomach.

Thank you very much, Water attribute, I thought. Let's work together to overthrow the Fire attribute one day.

I silently swore an oath of allegiance to the Water attribute as I watched clean water pour into the ceramic pot.

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The fireplace emitted a warm light. I covered my legs with a blanket and ate slices of the glorious cranberry-apple Gol prepared for me as I reread *Introduction to Spellcrafting I*. Thanks to Mister Speria's lecture earlier, I'd gained some new insight into spells. If I reread the book, I hoped I would be able to better understand it. Reviewing your lessons is important.

While I read, Mister Speria sat in front of the fireplace and checked his equipment.

I confess, I knew that we had been sharing food, but I couldn't bring myself to share my glorious cranberry-apples.

Sorry, mister. Forgive me. Our friendship doesn't apply here. I cannot give them away. I apologized to Mister Speria in the depths of my heart as I returned to my study. But with a full stomach and the warmth from the fire, I began to doze off.

As a self-proclaimed bookworm, this was unsightly behavior, but it couldn't be helped. I mean, Gol was sitting next to me and felt super warm. She was basically a hot-water bottle. No…this warmth felt more like that of a kotatsu.

I sensed Gol's intense stare fixed on my profile as I began to doze off, but I was accustomed to this. It certainly wasn't enough to vanquish my drowsiness.

Just as I was about to crash, Mister Speria spoke. "Oh…? Is that *Introduction to Spellcrafting*? How nostalgic. I studied that back when I was a beginner."

At the sound of his voice, I rubbed the fatigue from my eyes. Speria's brow furrowed with memories as he regarded the book. But, at the same time, his gentle eyes were darkened by shadows and seemed terribly lonely.

"I see…" he murmured. "You're reading that to study spellcrafting, right?"

I was still a little tired, but Mister Speria's next words yanked me straight out of dreamland.

"It's only…Luvel Zairein is the book's author, isn't he? That man, you see, was my spellcrafting master."

Chapter 16:
Earth Dragon and Assistant Professor

"I'LL BE HONEST, I came all this way to investigate Samari because I heard Master Zairein was living in seclusion somewhere in the region and wanted to offer any assistance he might require," Mister Speria said from his place by the fire.

My desire to sleep had completely dissipated. I could only stare at him with wide-open eyes.

"Well…" Speria scratched his head, ashamed. "*I* actually hoped to get some help from *him*, but I ended up having to turn around."

Semau Speria—this good-natured, bespectacled man—was the disciple of the crazy Luvel Zairein, who summoned me with the intent of destroying the world.

I did recall Zairein's author bio saying that he served as an honorary professor at a spellcrafting academy. At that time, I'd only thought, *Damn elite!*

Augh…and Mister Speria had introduced himself as an assistant professor at an academy when we met, so I should have noticed the connection earlier.

Jeez, it really was the right decision not to use Luvel Zairein as my name.

But could the splendid, sensible, and cultured Mister Speria really be a disciple of that bastard Zairein? That was ridiculous. I couldn't simply swallow such an absurd statement. This had to be one of those instances where the student overcame the master. You know, like, "Psh, his scholarly achievements? Forgettable."

Nevertheless, to think that Mister Speria came all the way to Samari to get Zairein's help… *Sorry, Mister, but that idiot's just a skeleton in a cave. There's no way he could help you*.

While I was shocked at the revelation of this relationship, I was simultaneously relieved by a tangential epiphany. If the man in front of me really was Zairein's student, then I could finally dismiss the possibility that it had been several hundred years since the time of Zairein's death. To tell you the truth, because I'd only encountered skeletons up to this point, I had been seriously concerned that civilization might have collapsed.

I didn't know how long ago Mister Speria had studied under Zairein, but he seemed to be in his mid-forties, though it was possible he was younger. So calculating backward from that, was the summoning time lag maybe thirty years, at most?

There were so many questions I wanted to ask, but I was pretty sure it would be a bad idea to reveal my identity as the "Sorcerer King" to a denizen of this world. Yup…bad, bad, bad, no matter how I looked at it. My

designated fate was to destroy the world, and I also recalled a section in Zairein's testament describing how prior Sorcerer Kings had been killed.

I had to hide my true identity. It was the sensible thing to do. If it got out that I was the Sorcerer King, I would be arrested even if I hadn't done anything.

However, in that case, what kind of questions *could* I ask?

While I was trying to think through all of this, Mister Speria prepared his sleeping bag and conked out. He habitually went to sleep early to avoid being assaulted by the monkeys at daybreak. I'd just save my questions for a later date. After all, it seemed it would take us a few more days to escape the miasma, so I would be accompanying him at least until then.

I came to that conclusion, lay on the floor, and was about to pull the blanket over me…but Gol anticipated my actions and pulled the blanket up to my shoulders before I could. This soothing gesture had remained the same even after her transformation. My eyes followed my partner's hands and stopped at the area around her wrists.

"That reminds me. You're wearing those strange bracelets…" I said.

The second Goltarou turned into Gol, she'd suddenly acquired some curious cuffs on her arms and legs. The same mysterious design was inscribed on each. She'd had no such accessories when she was Goltarou. Well, given the multitude of strange changes she underwent when she turned from a mannequin into a beautiful elf goddess, these bracelets and anklets were small potatoes.

"It's just…I feel like I've seen them somewhere before…"

But where could that have been? As I stared at the bracelets, a vision popped into my head.

Ah, right. I remembered. They were on that corpse I discovered at the bottom of the hole in the back garden in the basin—the victim sacrificed to summon the Sorcerer King. The corroded shackles on her limbs had been about the same size as these cuffs…

"Oof…" I could no longer withstand my drowsiness and let out a long yawn. My thoughts gradually began to stagnate, a thick cloud covering my mind. I knew exactly why I was so tired. Wrapped in a blanket and snuggled by Gol, I was unbelievably comfortable. Her warmth and softness were too relaxing to resist, and they soon lured me to the cusp of dreamland.

Gol's mysterious heating function was sinful, making me fall asleep so quickly. I was helpless in the face of this warmth. And just like that, I sank deep to the bottom of a sea of slumber.

I woke the next morning totally refreshed. After a breakfast of bread and dried fruit, accompanied by an herbal tea provided by Mister Speria, we set off westward.

The early morning air was chilly. Our footsteps echoed on the hard stone road. Notably, there were only two pairs of footsteps: mine and Mister Speria's. Gol didn't make any sound at all, walking silently like a cat.

After some time on the road, I became concerned. The Earth miasma seemed thicker than it had yesterday. The landscape ahead was stained deep brown. Was it so dark before?

"Can miasma thicken this much overnight?" I asked. *Please teach me, Speria-sensei!*

"No… Or, a slight change in density, yes, but such a clear and drastic shift within such a short period of time is unheard of. That *is* strange…" Mister Speria seemed concerned by this phenomenon as well. After he answered me, he became quiet, sunk deep in thought.

I slowly looked around us. As a matter of fact, I was concerned about something else as well. "There aren't any monkeys, either…"

Not a single monkey had shown up all day. We were well past the point when they should have been popping up all over the place. The area around the shrine had been similarly lifeless, but there, monkey corpses had been strewn about. There was no such carnage in evidence here. Up until sunset the day before, monkeys lurked everywhere until they were dispatched by Gol's axe kicks.

Why were there suddenly none this morning? Could they have been scared off by Gol's kicks? There was a non-zero chance that was the case. The monkeys were unexpectedly clever, so at times they would hang back if they realized they were at a clear disadvantage. For example, if I decided to have lunch after one of Gol's one-sided massacres, not a single monkey would appear, even if I continued to loiter around for a few hours.

This was also the reason I slept so nonchalantly in Gol's arms. In a given area, the deterrent effect of Gol's bloodbaths lasted for a day or so. Though since we'd been continually moving locations, I hadn't really been able to study the monkeys' self-preservation instinct. I did have evidence to suggest it existed—if it didn't, the pile of corpses by the shrine would've been much larger. Also, if the Greek statues had to exterminate swarms of monkeys every day, there would have been fresher corpses in the piles instead of only skeletons.

QED: These monkeys wouldn't approach anyone who clearly overpowered them.

However, by the time we reached the settlement the day before, the nearby monkeys had mostly returned to their burrows for the night. As such, Gol had only kicked two or three local monkeys to death. Such a low kill count shouldn't have had any effect on the monkeys' behavior.

So why were they gone…? Something was wrong.

Mister Speria continued in silence, wearing a troubled look. He was likely pondering the same questions I was.

For her part, Gol didn't seem concerned. She walked behind me just as always, seeming to be in a perfectly good mood. Because I turned to check on her, Gol drew her face close. I was reflected in her ruby eyes, which glittered as if she expected something.

On closer inspection, Gol's long ears were also fluttering. I'd noticed before that her ears moved like that whenever she was in a good mood—usually the result of something I had said, or a compliment I gave her.

"You're in good spirits. Am I just worrying over nothing…?" I wondered aloud.

Welp. I turned back around and continued leading us on our way. If Gol was so chipper, I didn't think we had anything to worry about.

The auburn expanse was as vast and barren as usual. Although I considered it a wasteland, it wasn't completely flat; rocks and cliffs provided some difference in elevation. Then again, the natural shelters in this area weren't that tall. As such, although the haze from the miasma blurred the landscape, our ability to survey was fairly good.

At that moment, a strong west wind blew, causing me to close my eyes for a second. When I opened them back up, something strange had happened.

"Eh…?"

Frankly, I doubted my eyes. An enormous black object the size of a mountain had appeared in front of us. It really was titanic…like, in a class of its own. To tell you the truth, because it was so large, I couldn't grasp its true enormity. It easily towered over a ten-story building.

Furthermore, this object was slowly moving.

It was a dragon, an immense quadruped with five massive horns lancing out from its face and forehead, its body armored in scales as thick as bedrock. At a glance, it looked like a carnivorous five-horned triceratops with the body of a black lizard.

It definitely felt evil.

The dragon hadn't noticed our presence…or, I didn't *think* it had. It placidly crossed the way ahead of us. Why hadn't we detected this stupidly huge creature until it got so close, even in such an open, high-visibility area?

And hey, wait. What was up with Gol's mysterious danger radar?

Gol suddenly jumped in front of me. There was panic in her movements. Had she really not sensed the leviathan until now?

At the same time, I heard Mister Speria mumble beside me. "The ancient Earth Dragon… I-It can't be… Impossible…" His complexion was awful. Sweat poured down his brow as he muttered, his eyes wide. "Did it create the Earth miasma…? But why here of all places…? Does that mean it moved its habitat this far south in such a short time frame? It couldn't be… But in that case, this… Right, this isn't darkness, but Earth—"

Mister Speria was clearly disturbed, swallowed up in a whirlwind of thoughts. This was a frequent affliction of intellectuals. I knew I had to bring him back to reality.

"Speria!"

My call caused him to jump a bit, and he turned to me suddenly, as if he had realized something. "Nemaki, quickly! Hold back Goretaru! We must not provoke that dragon!"

I obeyed and anxiously leapt on top of Gol.

Whoa, her waist was thin! More importantly, I hugged Gol's delicate middle and took a deep breath. Going by her stance, Gol had been about to lunge right at the dragon. Mister Speria's warning was spot on. I made it just in time.

Hm? For some reason, Gol's entire body became weak and limp in my arms… Hey, was she okay?

At that point, the three of us quickly took cover behind a rock. This whole situation was throwing me for a loop. To think that Mister Speria would be so rattled that he fell into a trance.

For my part, I believe I had matured quite a bit since I first got spooked by monkeys covered in scales. I guess, in a sense, I owed those simian devils my gratitude, even if their defiance of biology continued to beat on my sanity.

Or maybe I felt this ancient Earth Dragon was so unfathomable, so disconnected from any reality I knew, that it was simply beyond my ability to understand, and as such, I was calm. This carnivorous, super dreadnought-class triceradragon was too anomalous to comprehend, let alone fear.

As I held my breath in the rock's shadow, I peeked at the dragon.

Ack! Gol had left the basket on the ground in the middle of the road. We'd be in trouble if the dragon spotted it. Ugh, no, I had to rephrase—Gol wasn't in the wrong. Any responsibility for my partner's carelessness lay on me, her creator.

As I was wracked with guilt over trivial matters, Mister Speria whispered, "Listen well. We'll make it out of here. But we absolutely cannot hope to defeat that beast. It is the ancient Earth Dragon, a being who exists outside of reason. It cannot be killed, no matter how strong Goretaru is."

Cannot be killed? What do you mean, Assistant Professor Speria?

“Seriously? Is it immortal…?”

Mister Speria thought for a bit before shaking his head. “It’s difficult to call it immortal, per se… Let’s say, at the very least, there are no records of an ancient dragon ever being completely eradicated. These four dragons are the pillars of the world. It’s said that they’re the only beings that persisted after the destruction of the ancient world.” He swallowed and continued. “As you’ve just witnessed, that dragon managed to overcome Goretaru’s *Surface Detection* and blend into the Earth miasma. It is half spirit. Its physical body is here, but that means nothing.”

Pl-please don’t suddenly say something so philosophical, Speria-sensei. I was a bad student.

But our conversation ended there. We held our breaths and waited for the enormous body of the ancient Earth Dragon to pass.

Ah. Hey, stop, Gol. Don’t squirm. Be a good girl. I tightened my embrace around her.

Time passed. My arms began to tire…

I could still sense the ancient Earth Dragon’s absurdly large presence just on the other side of the rock. Did this monster not intend to leave? It was almost like it was loitering, or trying to find something.

Nonetheless, whatever it was doing didn’t matter. We had been forced into a battle of attrition. More precisely, my arms were starting to give out.

Ugh, this damn lizard’s a public nuisance! Can you please hurry up and leave?

It was at the moment when my exhausted soul cursed the beast that a sudden chill ran down my back.

I was in the air.

Gol had wrapped her arms around me and leapt into the sky with frightful momentum. For a moment, wind pressure buffeted me to the bone. Suddenly, my surroundings had changed from earth and ground to clear blue sky.

When I looked down, the auburn land far below was interrupted by the enormous back of the black Earth Dragon. I was several tens of meters up in the air, held within Gol’s embrace.

Then I looked at the hiding spot we had just left and words failed me.

I couldn’t believe my eyes. The land was wounded, marred by a gorge of devastation. It looked like something huge had bulled through it, leaving a deep, dark trench in the ground in its wake. The sickly brown Earth miasma swirled down the length of this black furrow.

“What the heck happened…?” I muttered, stupefied by the destruction beneath me.

Immediately after, I realized something and shuddered. What happened to Mister Speria? He had been standing next to me, right there in that spot, before it was cleaved out of existence…

Blood and warmth drained from my body. My abdomen, from my stomach to my entrails, was frozen solid. Yet at the same time, my heart beat violently, as if it would burst out of my chest. It was like it was trying to force blood into closed vessels.

I can't deny that until that moment, I had overestimated our capabilities. To be fair, together we were nearly peerless. My Gol was the strongest thing I'd ever seen. I was certain she could face anything—like that unnerving black demon we fought right after exiting the basin, which gave off an absurd sense of danger, yet which my partner annihilated with one hit. Even in the unlikely case that Gol was targeted by some strange spell, I could use *NTR* to protect her.

And for what it was worth, my title was still the "Sorcerer King"—the evil king who was the grand high boss of mana beasts. This absurdly large five-horned lizard had to be a mana beast…or so I'd hoped.

I was mistaken about the nature of our relationship.

Firstly, the ancient Earth Dragon was not a being of this dimension. Mister Speria had said that the ancient dragons were the four pillars of the world, and pillars are, as you know, a unit by which to enumerate gods.

Secondly, I had learned from Luvel Zairein's testament that in the past, Sorcerer Kings had been murdered, assassinated, and executed. Conversely, Mister Speria had also said that there were no records of the ancient Earth Dragon—or any entity like it—ever being eradicated.

So you see, in truth, the ancient dragon was of a considerably higher rank than the Sorcerer King.

The curtain opened to reveal a hopeless fight to the death.

Chapter 17:
Earth Dragon and Queen

FROM THE SKY, the ancient Earth Dragon's back looked like a black mountain range. It slowly shifted its body to turn toward us.

I forced myself to switch gears. I couldn't let myself think about that gracious, bespectacled man, the first person I ever met in this world. Any hint of regret could only spell death for me.

Right, switch gears, I was a man who could switch gears.

No problem. There's obviously no problem. I'm me, after all. Switching gears is—

I suddenly no longer felt that strange wind pressure within Gol's arms. The absence of wind gave the illusion that time had stopped.

Then Gol began to descend. She had leapt into the air with her impressive leg strength; she couldn't *fly*. And what goes up must come down, right?

During our descent, I locked eyes for a moment with the ancient Earth Dragon. Goosebumps rolled down my arms. Its stark black eyes held no emotion, not even a speck of bloodlust. It saw us as nothing more than flies.

Gol landed lightly on the ground. Even though we fell from such a height, she made no sound as she did. With great care, she lowered me to the ground. After she confirmed that both of my feet were planted, she bent forward to lower her center of gravity.

Gol rushed the ancient Earth Dragon like a pure-white arrow. Just before she was about to make contact, she jumped up at incredible speed. Her raised white fist caused the air to scream, and she threw her punch—the one that had pulverized every enemy she had ever encountered.

There was no particular technique to it or anything like that. It was raw power, a straightforward blow that used her whole body's momentum. However, this extremely simple attack was the best way to release her absolute destructive force.

Her fist landed a perfect hit. Since the Earth Dragon had turned to us, its flank, essentially its abdomen, was completely exposed, giving Gol a clear point of contact. At the moment of impact, the dragon's bedrock-like scales looked like one of those impact craters on the moon.

I gasped in relief. *We won!*

That force must have instantaneously transmitted to the dragon's internal organs, critically injuring or destroying them. It didn't matter how large a body was; if its organs were damaged, any living creature would fal—

"What…?"

The Earth Dragon did not fall. Far from that, it was unperturbed. It neither flinched in pain nor howled in anger. It didn't react at all. Even the

color of its eyes remained the same. Those emotionless black voids continued to see us as nothing more than insignificant creatures, bound to be crushed to death beneath great, uncaring feet.

Gol was repelled by the recoil of her punch. She usually didn't make a sound when she landed, but for the first time, I heard her hit the ground. A heavy thud reverberated and left a crack in the earth.

Immediately, Gol rushed the dragon again. With a jump, she soared through the air like a bird, landed on the Earth Dragon's back, and let loose a crazed rush of punches on the giant creature's spine. Her flurry of blows flew left and right in quick succession. Each blow carried the weight of fatal impact, leaving comet-sized craters in the dragon's thick scales.

However, the ancient Earth Dragon did not fall, even though I was pretty sure some of those attacks reached all the way to its spine.

Her enemy still not felled, Gol dashed up its shoulder toward its head. There, she spun in the air and released an axe kick like a guillotine on the Earth Dragon's thick neck. Her slender leg whizzed, whip-like, through the air. The explosion of impact echoed after.

This was execution by decapitation from a merciless war goddess. The monumental body of the ancient Earth Dragon dipped a few meters. Yet it remained standing. It didn't even stagger.

This evil, five-horned dragon wasn't just physically massive; between its hardened scales and dense, dark color, it had an enormous *presence*. It never faltered. It only continued to look down on us, motionless. Its stark eyes showed not a single sign of pain.

No effect, even after that demonic tornado of attacks? Unless this guy was composed of pure protein and calcium, there was no way his cells hadn't been damaged after taking all that abuse. What was going on with this creature's body?

It cannot be killed, no matter how strong Goretaru is. These last words from Mister Speria slipped into my head like a shadowy figure. It is half spirit. Its physical body is here, but that means nothing.

Was that *not* just a cryptic description used as a metaphor to express the dragon's composition? Were physical attacks actually meaningless to the body of this monster…?

Impossible. But that was the only conclusion I could make. I was speechless as I stared up at the Earth Dragon with a pale face.

As if in response to my stare, Gol was suddenly thrown backwards like she had been repelled by an invisible wall. What was that?! What was happening?

The Earth Dragon turned in the direction Gol had flown. It opened its cavernous mouth, revealing each of its fiendish fangs. Suddenly, an immense number of dirt particles converged between its jaws.

This phenomenon was all too familiar. It was an Earth spell—no, Earth *sorcery*.

As I had that thought, a colossal stone pillar of a missile shot at Gol. Ominous brown clouds of miasma whirled around it, radiating a strange purple plasma. This Earth sorcery was clearly different from the kind at the monkeys' disposal—had it been what destroyed the ground where we stood just moments before?

This was bad. Gol was in midair. Furthermore, she was off balance and defenseless. I frantically raised my right hand toward the missile. "*NTR*!"

I had executed this move against the monkeys over and over, and it had repelled their stone bullets every time, no matter how many thousands it had to catch. This was not an exaggeration. I was fully confident in the might and power of *NTR*.

If I could wrest control of the giant stone bullet, I could neutralize it. The Earth Dragon's bullet was significantly larger than the monkeys', but it was at most two meters in diameter and several meters in length. Furthermore, there was only one. Neither material nor structure would pose a problem for me.

And unlike the time I failed to control the golems at the shrine, I felt that strange sensation of hitting a target. *NTR* was working.

Yet the ancient Earth Dragon's projectile didn't stop. Its speed faintly decreased, but it continued straight toward Gol.

"Wha—?" I was speechless.

Fortunately, Gol reacted quickly. She spun, fixing her posture the moment the projectile slowed, before powerfully kicking off the ground. She brandished her right fist at the approaching bullet.

The white goddess's knockout punch crashed into the titanic rock spat out by that evil dragon. The two inimitable forces clashed, creating a shockwave. I grimaced against the furious winds.

The bullet plowed relentlessly forward, driving a furrow into the earth, and pushing Gol back with her fist still in contact with it. They left behind a river of destruction, a long, straight ditch of scattered sediment and miasma.

Gol had lost in a battle of strength. The stony material of the bullet was likely much different than I had expected.

As I thought that, a crack began to form in the center of the stone. It feathered out like a spiderweb, eventually covering the entire bullet. Then the bullet shattered.

Gol was caught in the secondary shockwave of its explosive end and blown back over ten meters. But she was uninjured, and she planted her feet firmly on the ground.

"W-we survived…" I unconsciously let out a sigh of relief.

But something was off. A large crack ran down the base of Gol's right arm. The crack soon circled Gol's thin limb, and then her entire right arm landed on the ground with a thump.

Gol staggered, lost her balance, and fell on her back. She desperately tried to get up, but her body stiffened, unable to move.

What's wrong, Gol? I thought desperately, blood draining from my face, my limbs, my whole body. "Gol, you all right?!"

I was so shocked that I couldn't think of anything. I stumbled as I dashed through the vortex of miasma to the injured Gol's side. I slid on my knees and held the torso of my partner in my arms.

Her body felt different than usual. It was so strange to see the residual brown miasma coiling around her white skin. Had she been hit by the mana in the stone bullet? Or perhaps, by the miasma itself…?

Incidentally, I was well aware that if the ancient Earth Dragon were to fire a second bullet, I would be caught up in the destruction and undoubtedly perish. That much was obvious. But if I left my Gol alone, she would die!

Fortunately, the Earth Dragon was quiet. Thinking back on it, I realized it didn't attack us while we were defenselessly falling from the sky either. Could it be that it couldn't fire off those stone bullets consecutively?

In any case, I embraced Gol's shoulders. She turned her head slightly and stared at me with her red, red eyes.

"I'm glad…I'm glad you're still conscious…" I murmured.

She usually made whatever part I touched of her body warm and soft, but she felt hard and cold, like a real statue. This was bad. What could I do? I never received any first-aid training for golems.

Just as I was at my wits' end, particles of dirt began to gather in front of the Earth Dragon's mouth again. The second shot was coming.

It was never an option to abandon the immobile Gol to avoid this attack. Not for me. I had to hold my ground and defend against it.

I tightly hugged Gol in my left arm and raised my right hand at the Earth Dragon. "Damn it! *NTR*!"

The tip of the approaching stone turned ever so slightly black.

I beg of you, please work. Curve!

Faintly—*very* faintly—the stone's trajectory shifted.

Winds billowed, a shockwave shook, and purple light flashed. The blast ruptured my eardrums as the stone passed. When I looked to my right, where it had traveled, the ground was all devastation. A massive jet-black ditch dripping with miasma seethed a mere two meters away.

Although *NTR* had provided only a meager shift in initial trajectory, it had diverted the line of impact more than I could have hoped. Was it due to the incredible amount of kinetic energy stored in the stone bullet?

"A-are we saved…?" I exhaled.

We were still alive. But why? The gears in my head spun rapidly. Why did *NTR* work this time and not the other? I was sure I had seen only half of the second stone bullet change color, and then only just as the trajectory was altered.

Wait…I had cast *NTR* at the first stone right before Gol made contact with it. However, for the second bullet, I cast *NTR* at roughly the same time as the Earth Dragon created it. Did it all come down to timing? Had I just not had enough time for the first shot?

I didn't know whether it was mana or miasma cloaking the Earth Dragon's stone bullet in such intense power. Either way, it meant I required much more time to completely control it, unlike the other spells I had encountered, which I'd commandeered instantaneously.

However, there was no way I could cast *NTR* any faster. Did that mean that at best I could only alter the bullet's trajectory? Worse, unless I somehow obtained full control of it, I couldn't use *NTR* as a counterattack. To make matters even more dire, an absurd amount of mana was sucked out of me each time I intervened with the Earth Dragon's stones. There was no way I could keep this up. Even if I continued playing defense, the moment I ran out of gas was the moment I would lose.

I also couldn't run away on foot. Not while carrying Gol.

Carry…? I looked down. Come to think of it, how much did Gol weigh? She habitually dodged any contact with me that might give away her weight, and with truly formidable maneuvers at that. As such, I had no idea how heavy she was. Actually, the way she lightened herself at times gave the impression of a shy maiden who tried her hardest to fake her weight in front of the man she adored. In fact, this was the first time she had felt even moderately heavy in my arms.

Whatever the case, it was impossible to run away with Gol injured. On top of that, it would go against my personality and all I held dear to abandon her and run away by myself.

I had no choice but to either somehow land an attack or escape between the Earth Dragon's shots. Whether doing so was possible didn't matter. These were my only options.

I wracked my brain for any memory of the handful of beginner spells in *Introduction to Spellcrafting IV*. I'd never used any of them for fear of an explosive misfire, but it would be foolhardy to avoid them for safety's sake when the situation was already so perilous.

Besides, on top of my Earth spells, I could use sorcery. I now understood the difference between them: Earth spells by themselves didn't allow me to do anything with the things they created, but with sorcery, I could freely manipulate my creations through the air like RC toys—just like the ancient Earth Dragon and the monkeys could with theirs.

If I was going to counterattack, this was the only way.

I summoned my will, focused on the ground in front of me, concentrated, and began to cast. "*Earth Spear*."

Grains of dirt rolled together over the ground. They twirled and intertwined until they formed the lengthening shape of a bar. Once it reached two meters, it made for a heavy brown spear.

All right, looks like I've accomplished the first step.

It didn’t seem like my creation would disintegrate, either, meaning I had managed to properly craft it.

I chose a spear for a reason. Other introductory spells would have let me create axes and hammers, but I needed a weapon that could fly. A spear, made to be thrown, was therefore the most appropriate. Moreover, once I got it flying through the air like the monkeys’ stone bullets, a spear would have the best penetrative power.

Now came the hard part.

How exactly do I activate sorcery…?

I figured it should be fundamentally similar to how I used *NTR*. The only difference would be the target—I wouldn’t be manipulating an enemy spell, but rather one I created myself.

I had to believe in myself. If those damn monkeys could instinctively use sorcery, then I, a higher-level primate, the human me, could do it too. I could not under any circumstances lose to those monkeys.

Burning with this needless antagonism, I began my courteous request to the spell, just like I always did with *NTR*: “*Friend spear, I want to defeat that dragon. Please lend me your strength.*”

The second I finished my request, a familiar sight unfolded. That ominous jet-black color consumed the spear as it silently hovered in the air and pulsed with a perplexing aura. It looked exactly like the kind of spear a dark demon lord would manifest in hell.

Yeah, success! Did you see that, you monkeys?! I can finally stand equal to you!

Unlike with *NTR*, it seemed that I didn’t need an explicit order to manipulate my own creations. I mean, I couldn’t exactly cheat on myself, right?

I tried maneuvering the spell in the air to test it out. The black spear wheeled in a beautiful spin before my hand. It was perfect. It felt *right*. With this, I could face the dragon.

I made sure the spear was spinning like a drill as I made it float over my head. Then I aimed right at the middle of the ancient Earth Dragon’s forehead.

“Spear, pierce!”

That order was also a prayer. The Earth spear flew. As if possessed with a mind to slaughter, it shot straight for the dragon’s enormous forehead, slicing through the air with a strange whizzing sound. The black Mach-speed attack hit home between the Earth Dragon’s eyes…or seemed to.

Right before it made contact with the dragon’s forehead, my spear crashed into a transparent barrier and stopped moving.

“Huh?! What the hell?!” I shouted at this sudden turn. I didn’t hear a single damn thing about a mysterious barrier!

Why did my sorcery attack, which I worked so hard to fire, have to be blocked at the last second by this incomprehensible thing? What outrage!

What absurdity! I was sure Gol felt the same agony as me as we realized that, no matter how much we beat up on this monster, it just wouldn't die.

Nonetheless, this wasn't the end of my attack. The Earth spear kept trying to pierce the enemy, and the invisible barrier kept standing in its way. Their clash was just beginning.

The jet-black spear spun ever more violently. It flashed against the barrier, sending black sparks flying out from its tip. My spear was obviously abnormally powerful, yet the barrier held firm. Although it couldn't even be seen, this wall had to be the source of the dragon's unassailable sense of its own imperviousness.

Then…was that barrier the origin of the invisible attack that sent Gol flying before?

My spear continued driving into the barrier, but their battle couldn't last, and my spear was going to lose. With each spin, it whittled more and more of itself away. Finally, it used the last of its strength and shattered into a million glinting black particles.

"Ugh…!" I let out a small groan. The moment the spear disintegrated, I felt an unfamiliar discomfort, like I'd been forcibly cut off from a staggering amount of sensory information.

I lightly pressed down on my temples, shook my head, and peered upward again. The particles of my spear's remains returned to their original brown color as they rained down like snow.

Oh, how could this happen? My spear was defeated. To think that my first normal move would be beaten in such a disappointing way in its debut battle…

The ancient Earth Dragon remained implacably placid. As I stared at its emotionless eyes the color of mourning clothes, I was at a complete loss for words.

This dragon had shrugged off even the strongest of Gol's physical attacks. Furthermore, it practically ignored my precious *NTR*, overwhelming it with speed and quantity. Even the sorcery attack I had finally devised was repelled by a mysterious barrier. Despite the fact that Earth sorcery utilized physical mass and should have been effective against barrier spells, mine was repelled as simply as a gnat.

The dragon was a total cheat!

Chapter 18:
King and Earth Dragon

"HAAAH... HAAAH... You…! *NTR*!"

I slightly altered the trajectory of the incoming stone with my right hand. The frighteningly huge stone bullet crashed into the ground ten meters to my right. It burst through a cloud of miasma and tore a straight line into the earth with a thunderous rumble.

Each shot left nothing but destruction in its wake. In contrast to its violent landing, the stone bullet sliced through the rock-hard surface of the land as easily as a hot knife through butter.

It was a chilling sight to behold. As we watched, clouds of miasma congealed in the newly formed ditch. From where I crouched, I couldn't see into its dark, dark depths.

Roughly ten minutes had passed since my first sorcery attack, *Earth Spear*, was deflected by the barrier. I was locked in a stalemate with the ancient Earth Dragon.

At least Gol was able to move now, if only a little. There was still no way to get her out of this situation. The moment she left my side—for instance, to attack—she would be instantly demolished by a stone bullet. As such, I was forcibly holding her stiff body back as she weakly tried to stand.

Between the gouged earth and maelstroms of miasma, the world around us was the spitting image of hell. The aftermath of a single stone bullet was horrific enough, but as the dragon fired shot after shot, we were now trapped in a disaster zone of unspeakable proportions. Not even the combined force of a simultaneous earthquake, tornado, and meteorite could have wrought such devastation.

And yet, even now, I continued to attempt to break through the dragon's barrier with *Earth Spear*. If I could only pierce the invisible shield, I believed I could lay into the ancient Earth Dragon with a sorcery attack.

As of now, that Earth Dragon had withstood the waves of Gol's attacks in total indifference, and talking in pure destructive potential, my Earth spear couldn't begin to compare to Gol. However, my Earth spears could stand their ground against that infernal barrier. Being the creation of an Earth spell, *Earth Spear* was both a tangible object with mass and a jam-packed bundle of mana. As such, I believed an attack from my spear was qualitatively different from Gol's punches and kicks. If I had any chance of breaking through, my spears would be it.

I knew this was likely wishful thinking on my part. But I had no choice. I had to gamble on the slimmest possibility in this hopeless situation.

Fortunately, my spear could fly freely through the air with only a bit of guidance, making it more of a jet-black surface-to-air missile than an RC toy. As I hindered the onslaught of the Earth Dragon's stone bullets with

NTR, I used the brief interval between its attacks to fire my guided missiles again and again from every imaginable direction, trying to find the right spot to attack the dragon's underbelly. The storm of black missiles continually streaking toward the enormous dragon looked like a scene straight from a kaiju film.

But every single wave was repelled by the barrier.

"No matter what I do, nothing will…" I panted.

There were no gaps to exploit. Moreover, *Earth Spear* couldn't even make a dent in its defense. There was a stark, numbing difference in power between my spear and the dragon's barrier. And here I thought my spear looked so terrifying and possessed such attack power…

Cowering on the bare ground, I stared up at the towering Earth Dragon. My shoulders shook with each heaving breath. This battle might have looked like a stalemate, but it was rapidly worsening for me. I had begun to scrape the bottom of my mana barrel.

The spear sorcery I could do all day, but *NTR* depleted my stores at an alarming rate each time I very, very slightly shifted the trajectory of the Earth Dragon's stone bullets. Basically, I was tapped and out of breath. And frankly, I didn't think I could divert another shot.

Conversely, the Earth Dragon didn't seem the least bit exhausted.

If this drawn-out battle continued even a few minutes longer, I would burn up all my mana and lose. The moment I could no longer divert the stone bullets, Gol and I would die.

There was nothing left. I had to find an alternative to *Earth Spear*.

"But even knowing that, what can I do…?"

I needed another path forward, but we were at a dead end.

I had already pushed my Earth spear to its limit, doubling the power of its violent rotations. As long as I couldn't break through the barrier, there was absolutely no point in chucking an axe or hammer. The other spells in the introductory book included creating a pedestal; grabbing something from a high place; and a simple, disposable toilet to be used outdoors—all useless.

I take that back—pedestal aside, the toilet was actually quite helpful. It was still of absolutely no use against the ancient Earth Dragon.

Suddenly, a certain beginner spell crossed my mind: *Create Pebble*.

While the other spells in the introductory book came out normally when I cast them, that spell always ballooned into something much larger than the book described. And if I used sorcery to throw that hulking boulder…it might actually crack the dragon's barrier. At the very least, I knew my "pebble" was consistently far larger than the Earth Dragon's stone bullet.

But I hadn't entertained the use value of *Create Pebble* thus far for a reason: its lengthy creation time. It took a considerable amount of time to complete—by my internal clock, several minutes. Then again, I was typically so freaked out by its ostentatious manifestation—not to mention the

consequent destruction—that I felt time slow down whenever I cast it. But even if I took my mental paralysis into consideration, using *Create Pebble* wasn't brief.

There was a fixed interval between the Earth Dragon's bullets. Additionally, it took time to ready its ammunition. And it definitely wouldn't wait around for me to ready my own. I might need to avoid one or two shots from the Earth Dragon while I prepared my spell.

Was I capable enough to utilize *NTR* while simultaneously executing spells?

"No choice," I muttered. My mana supply was nearly tapped; worse, I'd be cutting it close. I didn't even have time to hesitate.

I pointed my right hand at the ground and focused. "I'm counting on you… *Create Pebble*!"

I prepared myself for the whirlwind of dirt and torrent of mana. As I did, an awful thought occurred to me: Would I still be able to intercept the Earth Dragon's stone bullet inside that horrible blinding storm…? *This might be even harder than I expected*.

Sweat gathered on my brow at this realization, and I focused on the Earth Dragon's mouth.

Then I noticed something strange. I didn't feel the usual torrent. No mana-hungry flood, no blinding dirt tornado blocking my view, nothing…

Wait. There *was* something.

What was it? I panicked and looked at my right hand. I was stunned by what lay there: a pebble, no larger than the tip of my finger.

Why…?

I was profoundly disturbed. Hadn't my *Create Pebble* ended with a mountain-sized boulder that demolished its surroundings when I tested it before? My memory wasn't mistaken; there was no way I could forget. The aftermath of that destruction was where I had planted the seeds of my favorite fruit in this world…and where I buried that poor girl I discovered at the bottom of the well.

Just as my mind was about to go blank, Gol's stiff fingers desperately grabbed my sleeve. Startled, I looked up.

A sea of dirt particles was gathering in the Earth Dragon's open mouth.

"*NTR*!"

An explosion and shockwave rang in my ear. The ground shook beneath me, and a terrible cloud of dust and miasma flashing with purple light blew past. Shards of the stone bullet shattered like buckshot, and one of them cut my forehead, spraying blood everywhere.

"Ugh, damn…"

The sound and shock reverberated in my ears. My vision narrowed and I was horribly dizzy. That had been dangerous. In my stunned state, I was late in diverting the bullet. The stone nearly got us.

Worry kicked me in the gut and I inspected Gol, who was still sheltered in my embrace.

Good… She's safe.

I lowered my head, relieved. As I did, several drops of blood from my cut fell on her white cheek, staining it red. Something was different about her…

Her eyes were fixed on the bleeding spot on my forehead. Those usually ruby eyes were now a desolate blue.

"Your eyes—" I cut off.

Are you crying, Gol…? Don't be like that. You've lost a whole arm; I'm sure you're in way more pain.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'm fine."

To be honest, I wasn't fine at all. But I had to say that. I didn't want her to cry.

My consciousness was beginning to fade from the fatigue, blood loss, and mana burn. I didn't think I'd be able to defend against the next shot. I laughed at my sorry state, and the Earth Dragon opened its vast mouth even wider. Particles of dirt gathered once more, forming a rock far larger than the previous one.

Did it intend to end the battle with this attack?

I raised my right hand to engage the Earth Dragon and pushed my concentration to its utmost limit. I'd long since passed the point of caring how much mana I allocated to this maneuver. I mustered all my strength and shouted at the top of my lungs: "*N-T-R*!"

The Earth Dragon fired; the colossal stone careened toward us. Yet to me, it looked almost like it was coming in slow motion. It was even larger than I had expected. Even at full power, my sorcery couldn't catch up; the color change crept far too slowly.

Please make it in time. I beg of you. Please, I beg of you.

However, my prayer was in vain. The looming shadow of the rock began to look more and more like the cloak of death. The ungodly huge boulder and its vortex of miasma were upon us.

Ah, no good. I knew it. I couldn't make it in time.

As I felt the cold hand of death crawl up my back, a single regret crossed my mind: *Gol, my precious partner. I'm sorry for not being able to properly protect you…*

"Storm Cannon!"

Suddenly, a sphere of whirling wind flew in from the side and collided with the Earth Dragon's stone bullet. The clash between howling hurricane and terrifying stone sent the brown miasma flurrying in every direction.

For a few glorious seconds, this ball of ferocious wind wedged against the stone and stopped its approach. It even pushed the stone back by precious centimeters. I couldn't believe my eyes.

However, that was the end of the miracle.

The power of the ancient Earth Dragon's sorcery was truly fearsome. Once those seconds passed, the whirlwind was overpowered by the boulder's oppressive strength and dissipated, becoming nothing.

In the end, this sudden eruption of wind couldn't do anything to mitigate the stone bullet's inevitable destruction, let alone stop or slow its trajectory. All it did was delay the end by a few seconds.

In a normal fight, this wouldn't even have been considered buying time. Such a short period of relief would ultimately prove meaningless…

However, this breath was more than enough for me. The giant boulder had turned utterly, completely black.

I looked in the direction the whirlwind had come from. A single person stood on top of a cliff made by the gouged earth, surrounded by miasma. It was a thin middle-aged man in tattered clothes. He wore a pair of cracked glasses and a glittering turquoise crystal earring on his right ear. His hair was horribly disheveled, making him look awfully unreliable. But right now, this man was mesmerizingly cool.

Mister Speria!

Covered in wounds, Mister Speria cried out with all his strength, "Go, Nemaki!"

I turned back to the enemy I had to defeat.

I glared at this dragon the size of mountain ranges. Its thick scales made it unable to move its face. Yet, for the first time, it seemed to have an expression. One I knew. One with which I was very, very familiar. It was like the thing the dragon trusted most had been lost. For example, if its wife of many years had betrayed it with the plumber.

Ah, that expression. To think it could make such a *fantastic* face.

"*That's right, you damn lizard. I was dying to see that look*." A terrifying voice echoed from deep within my throat. I didn't even know I could produce those sounds.

I have a confession to make: This behavior was absolutely unbefitting of a reasonable and cultured man, but from the moment I saw Gol crying, I was, frankly, pissed.

"DIE!" I howled.

As if in response to my enraged cry, the black boulder slowly turned over to face the Earth Dragon.

The Earth Dragon flinched and took a dragging step back, as if it were scared. Practically at the same time, the black boulder crashed into its invisible wall. The collision led to a tremendous shockwave that shook the earth and atmosphere. Streams of dirt, miasma, and dust clouds burst into the air. However, I kept my eyes open and continued pushing with my attack.

The move I named *NTR* was complete when its target turned black. After that moment, I required no mana to manipulate it. Or if I did, it used so little that I barely noticed. But I had poured an absurd amount of mana into the spell before that moment. I didn't question where the surplus had

come from. Just then, I wasn't thinking of anything besides slaughtering the lizard that made Gol cry.

The jet-black stone pushed the barrier back by a hairsbreadth, and it suddenly began to emit an even darker presence, accompanied by an oozing black miasma. Just as it did, the barrier broke. The miasma-soaked rock slammed into the Earth Dragon's flank with horrifying velocity. It smashed scales, gouged flesh, and punctured organs, all while dripping that dreadful black.

I locked eyes with the Earth Dragon. In those enormous black voids, I saw a reflection: that of a man wearing a terrible scowl.

Ah, how could that be? I was a cultured man who promoted friendship and love. The face in that darkness was that of a total delinquent.

The Earth Dragon's eyes were stained with fear and despair. Light vanished from its pupils, and the body of the giant beast swelled before bursting into pieces, sailing upward on an ominous black flash of light.

I watched the ancient Earth Dragon's last moments with Gol still in my arms. Lacking most of its body, the Earth Dragon slowly toppled to the ground. The remains of its flesh began to slowly crumble. It looked just like my golems and the black demon did when they'd met their end.

While the body largely disappeared, a portion of the old, rotting skeleton remained. The words "half spirit" came to mind, as Mister Speria had said. The part that didn't disappear had to be the physical body of the Earth Dragon. However, I suspected the rest of the corpse would disintegrate before the end of the day.

I finally turned away and looked over Gol, nestled in my arms. She was quietly staring at my face. I showed her a cheerful smile and said, as casually as I could, "See? There was no need to worry. This is what happens when I get serious."

Mind you, this was a lie. I was on the verge of dying. Yup, I was bluffing my partner.

Gol's eyes were red.

Ah, it's so much better when you're smiling.

Chapter 19:
Farewell, Textbook

ANTICLIMACTICALLY, Gol's broken arm was easy to reattach. I feared she couldn't be healed from such damage, but after I stuck the missing limb to the stump, the two parts joined automatically. In roughly two minutes, she was completely restored.

"Gol, how does your body feel?" I asked. "Think you can move?"

In response, Gol opened and closed her fist. Most of her stiffness had disappeared. At this rate, she would be able to move normally in no time.

I touched my chest, relieved. Though if Gol showed signs of lingering symptoms, I would, of course, nurse her for the rest of my life.

In any case, that ancient Earth Dragon's stone bullets were truly terrifying. Ignorant and uneducated as I was, I didn't understand what exactly had caused Gol's malfunction, only that the attacks had managed to gravely wound my typically unbeatable Gol. I could only imagine what would have happened if a living creature like myself were hit by that stone…

Honestly, I probably would have been turned into minced meat by the passing wind before I even touched the stone.

While I was thinking such useless things, I said to my partner, who didn't look ready to walk yet, "Gol, be a good girl and wait here for a bit. I'm going to go check on Mister Speria."

When I saw Mister Speria on top of the cliff, his clothes were even more torn than usual. He seemed to have collapsed on the ground now, so I was a bit worried. He had already reached a certain age, after all.

As I headed toward the cliff by myself, I heard a loud crash behind me. I turned to find that Gol had tripped and fallen on the floor in an attempt to follow me.

Ah, I get it. I'll wait here with you until you can walk.

"Oof." I sat down next to Gol and took another look at the destruction surrounding us.

It was…pretty bad. Once the ancient Earth Dragon fell, the Earth miasma began to diminish. However, the ravaged land didn't miraculously return to normal or anything.

As you'd expect, our basket, the one Gol left on the ground when we first tried to hide, had been blown away without a trace. Even though the two of us worked so hard to create it… The clothes, food, and the *Introduction to Spellcasting* series I was reading had all passed into another life. How heartbreaking.

Oh, Introduction to Spellcrafting… My precious learning sessions with Emery-sensei… Eh, Zairein, you ask? Who's that? Never heard of 'im.

In any case, the silver lining was that I still had the valuables inside my kit bag. Most important of all, we were safe and sound with our lives intact after fighting that monstrous Earth Dragon.

"However, we don't have any food, so our journey ahead will get tough…" I muttered.

I wasn't really thinking when I said that, and that was careless of me. Beside me, Gol suddenly hung her head. She surely felt responsible for leaving the basket behind.

"N-no. Hey, wait, Gol. You're not bad," I protested.

Gol had done absolutely nothing wrong. No matter how you looked at the situation, she had no choice but to leave it. In fact, the reason why Gol left the basket behind was to whisk me away from the danger zone.

Ah… Wait, that meant… How could this be? It was completely my fault…

***

As I guessed, it was Mister Speria sitting on top of the cliff. Though I called it a cliff, it wasn't a natural formation. Rather, the monstrous power of the ancient Earth Dragon's stone bullet had remade the land, creating an overhang.

When Gol and I approached, Mister Speria raised a hand and sent us a faint smile. From what I could tell, he was covered in scratches, but he had no serious wounds.

"Ah ha ha… What a terrifying fight. I'm glad the two of you are all right," Mister Speria said as he weakly waved. He looked just like an overworked salaryman on the verge of collapse. He must have really pushed himself.

"We were saved thanks to your help… We barely escaped death." I gave my own tired smile and waved back. I, too, had to look in bad shape.

Although, now that I could see him up close, I realized Mister Speria's complexion was far worse than before; it was near ashen. And he was drenched in cold sweat. Worry flared. His condition was especially strange, as his external injuries didn't look that bad.

I should suggest the man have his liver examined at a hospital.

"Um, Speria, you're looking pretty pale. Are you all right…?"

"Ah, it's because I used *Storm Cannon*. Truthfully, I'm about to faint. But I'm fine. I'll be back to normal if I rest for a while."

Guess that Wind spell really was impressive.

The ancient Earth Dragon's stone bullet had overpowered Gol's strongest punch with its mass, and that last shot had been especially huge. Yet Mister Speria's Wind spell managed to push it back a few centimeters, even if only for a moment. I realized then that he might actually be an exceptionally skilled spellcaster.

"But I'm really glad you're safe," I said. "I was convinced that you were blown away by that first shot…"

Yeah, I really was glad he was fine. I was relieved from the bottom of my heart.

That weak smile of his returned. “At that moment, I used a high-speed launch type of spell to perform an emergency escape in the opposite direction of Goretaru. Well…it was reckless, which is why I’m in this state. That landing was rough.”

So that was why he was covered in scratches and his clothes were further torn. Honestly, his clothes were already tattered. If they were ruined further, he wouldn’t look that much different.

Mister Speria had been straining to smile, but his expression suddenly shadowed. “After that, I was overcome with a deathly fear. I hid behind the rocks the whole time. I really am shameful.” He turned away, unable to look me in the eyes. “I should have provided backup sooner. It was unforgivable to abandon you like that.”

I frowned. What are you saying, Mister? I thought you were a smart guy, but I guess I was wrong. Kinda dumb, really.

I brought my face close to Mister Speria, who was slumped over. “If you had a spell that allowed you to move at high speeds, you could have run away while we had the dragon’s attention. Right?”

The utterly exhausted spellcaster stared blankly up at me. I extended my hand to him where he sat on the ground.

“But…you came to our rescue. You are a brave soul whom I respect.”

There were only two kinds of people in the world who would throw down their own life for the sake of others. One was brave warriors who didn’t fear death. The other was proud, cultured people.

“Thank you very much, *Master* Speria.”

His eyes flared open and fixed on my face. A multitude of emotions raced behind them, like the surface of a lake rife with hidden currents. What exactly was this person thinking and feeling in his deepest depths? I didn’t feel equipped to speculate.

A silence hung between us. But Master Speria soon returned to his usual cheerful calm and scratched his head in embarrassment. Then he firmly grabbed my right hand. “You got me… I really can’t do anything wrong to you.”

I knew it from the very beginning. My teacher is an excellent, cultured person. He’d never do anything horrid to me.

***

“Hmm. To do that with *Create Pebble*…”

“Honestly, I had no idea what was happening.”

I asked Master Speria about the change in the size of my *Create Pebble* creation during the fight in hopes of learning how to properly cast the spell. If I could understand the reason for the misfire and devise a countermeasure, I hoped I could make actual use of it in the future. My teacher was a skilled spellcaster and scholar, so I was sure he would have the answers.

Also, his complexion was improving. He looked thoughtful as he said, “Usually, you see, the size of an object that a spell creates is fixed. No matter how much mana you imbue it with, that aspect won’t change. Though, the mass or density of the object might increase based on an influx of mana.”

“Huh, really? That’s one of the principles?”

“Hmph, yes…” Master Speria nodded to himself. “It’ll be easier for you to understand if I use Goretaru as an example. You must have imbued a vast amount of mana in her form upon her creation. However, that didn’t result in a particularly enormous golem, right? If you want to create a large golem, you have to weave an additional technique into your spell.”

Aha. It *was* easier to grasp with Gol as the case study. As a beginner, I had purposefully imbued a random amount of mana each time I cast the *Create Golem* spell, yet the sizes of the test golems and Gol’s first form were all tidily below two meters. But since I created Gol using that high-quality stone pillar, I had gone all-out.

“Well, I think in Goretaru’s case, improving her post-creation mana circulation is more important than strengthening her base. Though saying that, I’m no expert in this field, so…ah, I’m getting off topic.” Master Speria lightly cleared his throat and fixed his slipping glasses. “In short, a large-scale spell requires corresponding advanced techniques. If you created something based on the beginner textbook version of the spell, then it should be a beginner-textbook size. That’s a fundamental tenet in all spellcrafting.”

But then why did the pebble I created when I read the now-deceased introductory book on “discerning attributes” turn into such an abnormally large monster rock? When I asked, Master Speria had an answer for that, too.

“It’s possibly because you used a spell circle for beginners.”

Ah, the spell circles! For a second there, I forgot they even existed! And I did recall using a spell circle from the introductory book when I was discerning my attributes.

“Discerning your attributes is, more or less, an experiment to understand which attributes you have an aptitude for. As such, it’s necessary for people who have poor conversion rates within their given attributes—frankly speaking, those who don’t have much talent—to rely on something that ensures they can cast a normal spell. Once they have a handle on their specific aptitudes, they can conduct a more thorough examination.”

So it was an assessment, huh? Yet I only matched with the Earth attribute, even using such an accommodating exam. Why is that?

“That was why Master Zairein incorporated a technique for enlarging creations into the spell circle in his introductory book.”

“I see. So that’s why *Create Pebble* made something that large…”

I thought that was the end of this lesson, but Master Speria shook his head with a troubled look. “No, that wouldn’t usually happen regardless.”

“Oh? Is that so?”

“Yes, it’s frankly impossible. All you can really expect from that introductory spell circle is an increase in the base success rate. There’s no other effect to the additional technique. Specifically, it raises the scale of a spell by a degree of about ten percent. It certainly isn’t the sort of alteration that could increase a spell’s effect by one hundred percent. Which is all to say, the theory underlying that spell circle is highly advanced with meticulous calculations. Though, as you’ve seen, the circle itself is quite simplified.”

Master Speria suddenly paused. Then, as if he had noticed something, he stared pointedly at my face. “But if a person possessed an unconventional aggregate amount of mana, as well as a mana conversion rate that exceeded the highest-known limit…such an explosive incident could occur. And, right, this is just hypothetical, but…” He paused before continuing. “It might also happen if you were the legendary evil king intent on destroying this world…?”

My words stuck in my throat. I’d been found out. No doubt about it, I’d been discovered. He had figured out that I was the Sorcerer King.

Well, of course he had. I’d used sorcery to make that flashy spear attack. And as if I were showing off, I’d fired an army’s worth of spears after I lost my temper at my impotence against that ancient Earth Dragon. That whole time, I was being watched…

Master Speria had likely long since concluded that the *NTR* I used, for which he provided backup, was a form of sorcery. I could no longer make excuses.

To think that I would be arrested by Master Speria for the crime of attempting to destroy the world…

I have no choice. I’ll have Gol serve as my defense attorney. While she may not be able to provide proof of my innocence, she can at least destroy the prison bars for me.

Master Speria regarded my silence and let out a strained laugh. Then he lightly slapped my shoulder as if giving a warning to a bad student. “Listen, Nemaki. I probably don’t need to say this, since you’re smart, but… you must not perform that move you used against the ancient Earth Dragon in front of anyone else.”

“Yes, I understand. I’ll be careful… Thank you very much.”

My teacher silently nodded with a smile. “Okay, let’s stop talking about that disturbing old legend. We’ll rest here around a fire until our mana recovers.”

“Right. I’m pretty tired, too.”

As soon as I agreed, Master Speria rummaged through his bag and brought out something that looked like charcoal. He was always so well

prepared. Still, that shoulder bag was full of so many things that it felt like it had to be magic.

Master Speria piled some dirt on the ground and placed the charcoal in the center. “All right. Now we just need to light the fire.”

Oho, starting a fire. However, Fire spellcaster Speria, you’ve run out of mana, no? Thus, you cannot use Fire spells now.

Lighting a fire on top of charcoal could be quite a laborious task. It was on another level of difficulty over lighting a fireplace. He he, was it time for my partner to shine?

Go, Gol! Observe my Earth attribute’s speedy fire-starting! Be amazed and bow before me! Now that you’ve run out of mana, you’ve become worthless, the completely weak and incompetent Fire attribute!

“Heh, you’ve run out of mana, right, Master Speria? Leave this to me. My Gol will start the fi—”

“Hm? It’s fine. Fire spells are very efficient. *Ignite*.” He raised his right hand with a warm smile and set the charcoal on fire as he spoke.

The fire lit beautifully.

“Wha…?!”

It was done in the blink of an eye.

The Sorcerer King who won against the ancient Earth Dragon was now trembling at his defeat by a beginner Fire spell. As I lowered my head with tears in my eyes, Gol, sitting behind me, gently stroked my back.

Chapter 20:
Teacher and Bag

IT WAS JUST BEFORE NOON. As we sat on top of the cliff overlooking the ancient Earth Dragon's bones, we decided to have an early lunch. Master Speria stirred a pot of stew on top of the open-air fire. "All right, time for the rest."

He added some strange, bottled meat and a handful of dried vegetables to the pot. The smell wafting from it whetted my appetite.

While Master Speria was absorbed in making this otherworldly dish, Gol was devoted to stroking my injured forehead. She had been like this ever since her stiffness dissipated. She must have been waiting for the chance to tend me while she was unable to finely manipulate her fingers.

"Um, Gol…it's already healed, so it's fine…"

The scratch on my forehead had closed cleanly. Master Speria had used a healing spell, specifically of the Water attribute.

Thank you, Water attribute. My predilection for it was only growing.

Although there'd been a lot of blood, the location of my injury was the forehead, which contains a ton of blood vessels. The wound wasn't actually deep—it didn't have to be to bleed so furiously. However, the cut hadn't even left a scar. Healing spells were incredible. Did they surpass modern medicine?

That reminded me—when I first met Master Speria, there was a sizable bloodstain on his torn clothes. I'd thought he was in trouble, but he must have used a healing spell. Those had to be an indispensable survival skill in this world. But, well, you know…even though it was indispensable, I couldn't use it…

Time to put that sad truth aside.

I turned to Gol. "Um, so, Gol. My injury is already fine. You don't have to keep tending it…"

She refused my plea—ignored it, more like—and continued to caress my forehead. Because she was rubbing as delicately as she could, I couldn't yell at her to stop. But how long was this going to continue? I couldn't foresee an end…

Come to think of it, it seemed that Gol had become quite accustomed to Master Speria. She was on edge around him at first, so I'd been quite worried. But at this point, I think in her mind, Master Speria had ranked up from "a hindrance to eliminate" to "indifference." That was a positive development.

Although, I had by then realized that Gol might have a serious case of "Stranger Danger" anxiety. I was a bit worried about what would happen when we eventually reached a populated settlement…

Master Speria scooped some stew into a wooden bowl. "Here you go. Eat up."

I gratefully accepted it and slurped the warm stew. I sighed as it soaked into my exhausted body. The meat in this stew was particularly delicious. What was it? Beef? Like with a good beef-tongue stew, the meat melted in my mouth while retaining that wonderful chewiness. *What an exquisite texture. I could keep eating this forever. Seconds, please.*

"Looks like you like it." Seeing how excited I was for another helping, Master Speria looked satisfied.

"This meat is really quite delicious," I said.

"He he, listen and be amazed. This is a special Imperial delicacy. It's made with aged tongue meat from a mana beast known as the Wind Yale. I wanted to splurge a little to celebrate our survival."

"Ooh…" I didn't really get it, but I showed my surprise out of courtesy.

So he really did use quality meat. This world, with its strange meat and glorious cranberry-apples, had a variety of delicious foods. That was an aspect for which I could be grateful.

Master Speria slurped his own soup and nodded deeply. He seemed to be proud of his craftsmanship. "But you know, Nemaki… To think that you actually defeated one of the few ancient dragons revered as gods."

"Aah…" I gave a listless response to my teacher's words.

After all, when you think of gods, there's a significant spectrum of power and importance. Japan had a whole bunch, including, you know, a god of toilets and a god of rocks.

"Ah, do you perhaps not understand the gravity of what you just did?" Master Speria saw right through my evasiveness and pushed his glasses up. "Listen. The Flame Dragon, Wind Dragon, Ice Dragon, and Earth Dragon… these ancient dragons are believed to be the manifestation of the strongest gods. Even that extravagant title, 'Four Cornerstone Attributes,' was just something humans came up with to recognize the four pillars embodied by these ancient dragons."

"H-how hyperbolic… Ah, but after fighting that thing, I do have to agree to some degree. Between its size and its strength, it's no wonder it became an object of superstition—"

The moment I finished saying "superstition," my teacher burst out laughing.

"Ah ha ha. Right, 'superstition.' Ha ha. You have a truly interesting way of putting things into perspective." He laughed, enjoying this from the bottom of his heart. "Ah, on the topic of superstition. People say that even if the ancient dragons lose their physical body, they resurrect soon afterward. And, well, it's hearsay, so I guess you could call that a superstition."

"Resurrection, you say…?"

"Right, new life after death. It's said there were fights between the ancient dragons. There's even an old legend of how the Ice Dragon fought and died after a long battle with the Flame Dragon. However, the ancient

Ice Dragon is alive even now in the extreme north. Whether the record of this fight is factual is still debated by scholars."

Wait a sec. No matter how strange a life-form is, it is absolutely impossible for anything dead to resurrect, teacher.

My teacher grinned at my bewildered expression and jokingly said, "That's why, you see, the ancient Earth Dragon might resurrect soon. And I'm sure it holds quite the grudge against you. You'll have to be careful the next time you meet. Ha ha ha."

"Please don't say something so scary…"

If such a frightening horror-movie thing happened, and I had to have a revenge match against that monstrous beast, I was sure weak little me would die.

I was frightened to my core by this terrifying possibility when Gol finally left my side. Ah, had she grown tired of rubbing me? I was relieved to be freed from that relentless caressing and looked over toward her. She was cutting a glorious cranberry-apple into elegant slices.

She must have been waiting for me to finish eating my main meal. But wait, was that the only reason she stopped her petting?!

As usual, my partner's timing was impeccable.

After I finished the fruit for dessert, we all sat around the fire, warmed our bodies with Master Speria's herbal tea, and enjoyed a pleasant chat. I learned that if we continued on the road much farther west, we would reach the imperial capital. This country's capital was heavily populated, and the city was considered wondrously beautiful.

I was relieved. More proof that this world's humanity hadn't been destroyed. This wasn't a sorrowful world inhabited by only us two humans.

Another thing I discovered was that "Goretaru" was the name of the war goddess of slaughter and jealousy. Was this the explanation for Master Speria's complex reaction to her introduction? But Gol looked extremely delicate… She by no means looked like a war goddess of slaughter. Besides, she was thoughtful and gentle—a far cry from jealousy.

But Master Speria laughed and said that after spending time with us, he'd found Goretaru was exactly like her namesake. Exactly what kind of image did he have of Gol after these few days?

Master Speria laughed again and sipped his herbal tea. Then he suddenly remembered something. "Oh, that's right. Nemaki-kun, do you want to come with me to check out the ancient Earth Dragon's remains? You might find something interesting."

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Later, the three of us made our way to the bony remnants of the ancient Earth Dragon.

It really was huge. Only a portion of the skeleton had yet to decay, but it was still the size of a building. The bones didn't seem like they would last for much longer, either. Like they were all show and no go… They might

crumble at the touch of a light breeze. Actually, was it possible they were hollow?

Master Speria rummaged around the torso of the skeleton for some time. “Oh! Found it. It’s this, right here.”

It appeared he had found the thing he was looking for. He came over and showed me a large, stone-like object.

“What exactly is that?”

“It’s the ancient Earth Dragon’s sorcery core.” He appeared to be holding a giant crystal.

Ah, actually, I recognized it. It was more or less the same as the rocks I had found inside the large monkeys’ corpses. Luckily, I still had several of them stuffed in my kit bag in hopes of exchanging them for money, so they hadn’t been blown away by the Earth Dragon.

As my teacher explained earlier, sorcery cores were an organ inside mana beasts that manipulated objects created from spells.

“I see. So this is a sorcery core…” I said.

The sorcery core in Speria’s hands was far bigger than the large monkeys’. Also, while the monkeys’ cores were certainly dark, the Earth Dragon’s was completely black.

Though if I took a picture of it, I was sure it would look like a simple rock. You had to see it in person to really get the right idea. It was hard to describe, but the dragon’s sorcery core overflowed with an antagonistic pressure. It was on a completely different level from the monkeys’ in that respect too.

Hmph. As expected of mere monkeys…

“Sorcery cores are formed only inside bodies that can produce a dense amount of mana. Still…the ancient Earth Dragon’s is extraordinary, as expected.”

Did this mean you could only take these crystals from strong mana beasts? Was that why I couldn’t find anything inside the bodies of the small and medium monkeys, whereas they’d been plentiful in the large monkeys?

I hadn’t been able to tell the large monkeys were significantly stronger, as size didn’t matter for us; Gol defeated every one of them with a single, equal-opportunity hit. *Guess those large monkeys really were tough…*

“Hey, Nemaki.”

“Yes?”

“Do you mind entrusting this sorcery core to me…? I need it for research.”

“That’s fine. I don’t mind.” I naturally consented. I wouldn’t deny anyone their request if it was for research purposes.

In the first place, I hadn’t even known such an item existed. If my teacher hadn’t searched for it, I would’ve abandoned it and continued on my journey. Besides, I was sure my teacher was conducting his research for the benefit of the world.

I, on the other hand, would've been caught up in materialistic worry over my current economic situation and thought, "I might get some money out of it." But as a cultured man, I valued learning over economic gain. Though…could I still sell the monkeys' sorcery cores? I was concerned about that.

While I was in my materialistic little world, I suddenly thought, *Oh*?

Master Speria had been staring at the sorcery core in silence for some time. Usually, he would have started in on a lecture about various things by now. When he noticed my gaze, he slowly raised his head. Both his expression and tone were extremely serious.

"Now then, I know it's a bit regrettable…but this is where you and I will part ways. I'm heading north by myself."

"Eh?" I unintentionally raised my voice.

What are you saying, teacher? Are you going to leave me behind? That can't be. I-I'm not lonely or anything, but I didn't think we would split so suddenly. I thought we were going to go to the city together. I-I'm not sad.

"Wh-what do you mean…? D-did something u-urgent come up?"

"Yes… This matter, you see, requires investigation." There was a determination in his face as he answered me. He was resolute.

I thought for a moment that I could go with him to investigate. But I felt like he had placed an emphasis on the words "by myself." It wasn't the time to protest.

Come to think of it, Master Speria was extremely disturbed when he saw the ancient Earth Dragon here. It probably *was* an aberration of sorts…

Master Speria regarded my silence somberly. Then, as if suddenly hit by an idea, he began to empty his shoulder bag. He took out something that looked like a small ration of food, along with many unfamiliar tools—probably mana tools. Each of the items he removed got stuffed into the pouch on his waist or inside the pockets of his tattered robe.

I simply watched him. Ah, there went the ancient Earth Dragon's sorcery core. And there, though I only saw it for a moment, went a light novel-sized book, placed delicately inside the pouch. It looked just like my textbook, but there was no need for a teacher at a spellcrafting academy like Master Speria to study beginner Earth spells at this point. It was probably some other tome.

After Master Speria finished transferring those items, he took the bag off his shoulder. Then he held the bag out to me. It was a splendid shoulder bag made of rough, black leather. I wondered what skin it was made of. When I looked closer, I could even see scales.

"Take this bag with you," he said. "Food and water are inside. The basket with all your stuff was blown away during your battle with the ancient Earth Dragon, right?"

"Eh?"

While that was true and I was grateful for this offer, what would he do if he gave his bag to me? Also, I had Gol by my side, so I could make do if worse came to worst.

"But what about you?" I asked. "You're going on another investigation now, right?"

He responded to my question with a mischievous smile and puffed out his chest. "Heh. Don't look down on your teacher. I was once known as a prodigy at the Imperial Spellcaster Academy. My attributes are, if you can believe it, out of the twelve, ten! Well, just because I have the aptitude doesn't mean I can handle every spell available."

U-unbelievable?! I knew he was talented, but ten?! I can only use one, and it's a trash attribute! Why was there such a difference in people's talents? God was too cruel.

"Well, actually, you would only need advanced spells from two or three attributes to survive a journey by yourself. More importantly, it seems that you specialize in Earth spells, right? I'm more worried about you." Master Speria paused for a moment before getting politely ambiguous. "Earth spells are, how can I put it…? They aren't particularly useful in this situation."

My teacher's worry was warranted. My beloved Earth attribute could only create disposable pedestals and toilets.

I lowered my head and accepted the splendid black shoulder bag. "Thank you very much. You've taken care of me in so many ways."

"You don't need to thank me. This is just a modest farewell gift for my adorable student. Well, I'm not the type to call myself an excellent teacher anyway." He lightly clapped my shoulder. "If you continue on this road and head west, you should reach human civilization. Nemaki, from here on out is your story… Please, live freely and make your life the one you want."

Epilogue

AFTER MASTER SPERIA said his goodbyes, he headed off to the north. Gol and I stayed behind to rest a bit more. My partner hadn't fully recovered.

Still, what a lonely, empty place. There was nothing in this expansive wasteland other than the deteriorating skeleton of the Earth Dragon at my back. The wind whistled as it passed.

I let out a deep and lonely sigh. I-I wasn't feeling l-lonely or anything now that Master Speria had left on his own journey! After my sigh, I slowly sat down. Then I leaned back on the giant bones of the Earth Dragon. My tolerance for skeletons in this other world was practically at max level. The bones of the ancient Earth Dragon were nothing more than a backrest.

Gol also sat next to me, naturally. She bent her slender legs to the side in a feminine position, the dragon's white bones at her back. Her figure was mesmerizing, and breathtakingly picturesque.

"Still, partner…for some reason, you're looking super calm."

Since Master Speria left, Gol seemed almost relieved. With our group returned to just the two of us, she plopped down by me and unreservedly rubbed her shoulder against mine. Even though we were still kind of in a crisis, she was extremely relaxed.

"Aren't you feeling lonely now that my teacher isn't here?" I asked.

Since I had suddenly lost my conversation partner, I was tormented by this deep sense of solitude. Yet Gol looked content, as if a hindrance had been vanquished.

Why *did* we feel so differently?

Sitting shoulder to shoulder with the spirited Gol reminded me of my pet dog back in my original world. Come to think of it, he would also animatedly wag his tail regardless of whether I was happy or not. Golems really were like dogs…

Lost in these thoughts, I relaxed and reclined further back. Immediately after, a portion of the Earth Dragon's bones disintegrated under my weight. "Wha—?!"

Damn it! These bones really were hollow! The base of the bones had crumbled into sand. Without back support, I lost my balance and fell backward. In that instant, Gol, who had been leaning against me, maneuvered behind me and braced herself between me and the ground.

Gol, are you my airbag…?!

"Th-thanks for your help," I said. "Really sorry about that, Gol." As I thanked my partner, I tried to get up. At that moment, my right hand bumped into something hard. "Hm, what's this?"

A brown egg… No, that's not it. It looked like an egg, but it felt like a stone. It was bigger than a chicken egg but smaller than an ostrich egg.

Although it had a half-baked size, this strange sphere gave off a mysterious presence as I rolled it around in my hand.

From what I could tell, it was different from a sorcery core. That core was rougher and crystalline. Besides, Master Speria had already recovered it. Then, what exactly was this?

I highly doubted that this was the ancient Earth Dragon's egg. In the first place, its size fit more in the realm of "stone" than "egg." And I was sure that the egg of a creature that extremely huge would be larger than me.

Besides, could you even imagine an egg remaining this smooth and shiny even though the mother's bones, which were made of the same calcium, were on the verge of crumbling into dust? Hmph, impossible.

You may have noticed, but I'd been recovering my former level of common sense now that the threat of the unrealistic Earth Dragon had disappeared. Even so, what exactly *was* this round stone that had come from inside this corpse?

After pondering for a while, I realized it. A gastrolith!

A subsection of animals kept such stones in their stomachs. These stones would grind their food and aid in digestion. In short, they worked as a substitute for teeth. Right, this was a gastrolith. Definitely that.

If I remembered correctly, sauropods were extremely large herbivorous dinosaurs who carried such stones in their guts. The ancient Earth Dragon with its large horns *did* slightly resemble a triceratops. What's more, the strict definition of dinosaur was actually hotly debated in the scientific world.

I see, so that means…the ancient Earth Dragon was a dinosaur! And an herbivore to boot! Hey, hey, you serious? That was a dinosaur?!

But in that case, although they were admittedly large, was the evil king almost annihilated by a dinosaur and a bunch of monkeys…? I couldn't help wondering, was the Sorcerer King really just a small fry?

"Well, this stone looks like it'll sell for a lot." I held the mysterious round stone in my fingers before throwing it into my black shoulder bag. I suspected that the ancient Earth Dragon's gastrolith would go for a very large sum indeed.

Remember, a whale's gallstone can sell for a stupidly huge amount of money.

When I stuck my hand inside the bag, I suddenly remembered something. "I should transfer all the stuff inside the kit bag into this new one."

The shoulder bag I received from Master Speria looked more expensive and sturdier than my kit bag. If I was going to put my valuables somewhere, the new bag was clearly more suitable.

I readjusted my sitting position and took the items out of my kit. Gol watched intently from the side. I extracted the pouch with coins and the bundle of bills; the leather bag filled with the monkeys' sorcery cores; the

green, metal knife sheathed in a fine scabbard; and some glorious cranberry-apples. I carefully packed everything else inside the shoulder bag.

Looking over the collection, I considered that this was literally everything I owned.

"Oh. Can't forget this guy." I pulled out my pajama set from the bottom of the kit bag. Those same lame pajamas I was wearing when I came to this world. On this blue cloth, a yellow cat…no, were they hamsters? Really, what deformed faces they had… But there was still some charm to them, so they weren't completely hopeless. I addressed the face of this strange yellow animal with a sigh. "Somehow you've even become my name. You've made it big."

Although "Nemaki Dasai" was a strange name that I chose on the spur of the moment, I'd keep using it in front of others as long as the denizens of this world weren't suspicious of it. I still didn't have any more appropriate names to offer.

As I stared at the ugly, yellow cat while thinking these thoughts, Gol stretched out her hand from the side and retrieved the pajamas from my hands. What was she doing now? Confused, I watched. She placed the pajamas on top of her knees and began to fold them with meticulous care. The delicate movements of her slender fingers treated my pajamas as if there were no more-treasured item in existence.

Partner, I don't think you need to treat my cheap pajamas with such reverence…

After Gol finished neatly folding my pajamas and placed her precious cargo in the bag, I took the last item out of the kit bag: the map.

I opened it up. "According to Master Speria, if I continue on this road westward, it should take at most four days to get out of the miasma…"

The west wind always seemed to be blowing in this land. If the ancient Earth Dragon was the origin of the Earth miasma, then the damage spread from it would follow the wind and inevitably harm the east. Therefore, there shouldn't be as much damage to the west. Or so I believed.

I checked the locations of upcoming settlements on the map. There seemed to be a small settlement not too far from here. I could borrow an empty house there to spend the night. There were several more settlements after that. Among those, I was interested in one in particular. "This one looks quite large. Since it doesn't seem like a farming village, it might be an actual city… Um, what is its name?" I read the label out loud. "Hmmm. 'Tibar'…?"

Gol popped her head over my shoulder to peek at the map. Her long elf ears touched my cheek and tickled.

"I hope there are people in this city." When I said that, Gol's eyes slightly wavered and she looked away. What a strange reaction. "Hm? That face. Do you perhaps not want to go?"

Ever since Gol became a Greek statue, it had been much easier to read these changes in her emotions. I had been bitter and heartbroken when Gol turned into a bishoujo figurine, but it had also allowed us to better understand each other, so ultimately it wasn't that bad.

"I think my partner's social anxiety might be a problem," I said.

This happened with dogs as well. If a puppy was raised only knowing their owner, they'd continue to be bad at interacting with strangers even as an adult. I was sure it was the same with golems. This might turn unfortunate. I needed to socialize Gol as soon as I could.

"People, huh…?" I wanted to reach a human settlement as soon as possible not only for Gol's sake but, of course, for mine as well. Besides, from what I'd seen of Master Speria, the people of this world probably weren't evil. I had high expectations.

Honestly, though… All the living creatures Gol and I had met in this world so far were some monkeys, an old man, and a dinosaur… What was with this lineup? Not enough variety. Definitely not enough…charisma? Our journey was very much lacking a certain kind of charm.

As I stared at the map, these words slipped out: "I hope I get to meet a pretty girl in this other world…"

Whoosh!

The map fell out of my hands and onto the floor. Gol had suddenly smacked it. But since she was extremely cautious of my fingers holding the map, her movement was actually pretty gentle. In fact, we didn't even touch, so I wasn't hurt or anything. However, the hand holding the map was pulled down by the force of her hit.

"Hey, Gol. What are you doing?"

The map isn't a toy, you know. No playing with it!

I sighed in exasperation and picked up the map, brushing off the dust. "Listen, partner. This is an important guide that will lead the two of us to a date with a lovely lady. It'll be inconvenient if it gets dirty and I can't read —"

Whoosh.

Gol once again slapped the map, dropping it to the ground.

Hey!

"Like I said. Stop playing with the map, Gol."

Jeez, what a troublesome girl. I quickly folded up the map and put it back into the bag so she couldn't play with it anymore.

"All right, now."

Despite the unexpected disturbance from my partner, packing was done. Our break would be over soon, so it was time to depart.

It seemed Gol was able to move without problem. Seeing how she folded my pajamas, made such a facial expression, and slapped the map, the stiffness in her body must have completely disappeared.

While I was still somewhat fatigued, I'd recovered enough to walk. I didn't think I would ever grow accustomed to the strange exhaustion that

overcame me when I tapped my mana. It was like all the strength left my body. Granted, I had slowly recovered after a few hours' rest, but I was sure my mana had been completely depleted right after the fight.

"Then again, this time…it wasn't nearly as debilitating as the time I created you, Gol."

Even though I was completely wasted after that reckless battle, I had remained conscious and mobile. And in a relatively short amount of time, I'd recovered enough to feel I could walk a long distance.

Now that I thought about it, I might have put myself in a really dangerous situation when I created Gol. My condition then had been truly terrible. I couldn't move my body at all and had to spend over two days totally bedridden before I recovered. Not to mention, I might actually have spent more time unconscious than I believed.

That was…really dangerous. To think that creating a golem could be such a life-threatening action. And the introductory book didn't provide a single cautionary word…

"I won't cast *Create Golem* again for the rest of my life," I said.

When I swore that pledge out loud, Gol suddenly leaned her body against mine. She stuck so close to me that I thought she was glued on. From so near, I could see her eyes sparkling like a starry sky. A strong heat emitted from her soft body. She pressed her delicate shoulders into my chest and her long ears fluttered cheerfully.

"What's up all of a sudden…? You're in good spirits."

She seemed to be really enjoying life.

Please share some of your mysterious energy with exhausted old me!

After I stroked the snuggling Gol's head, I slowly stood up. Then, after a long stretch, I turned to her.

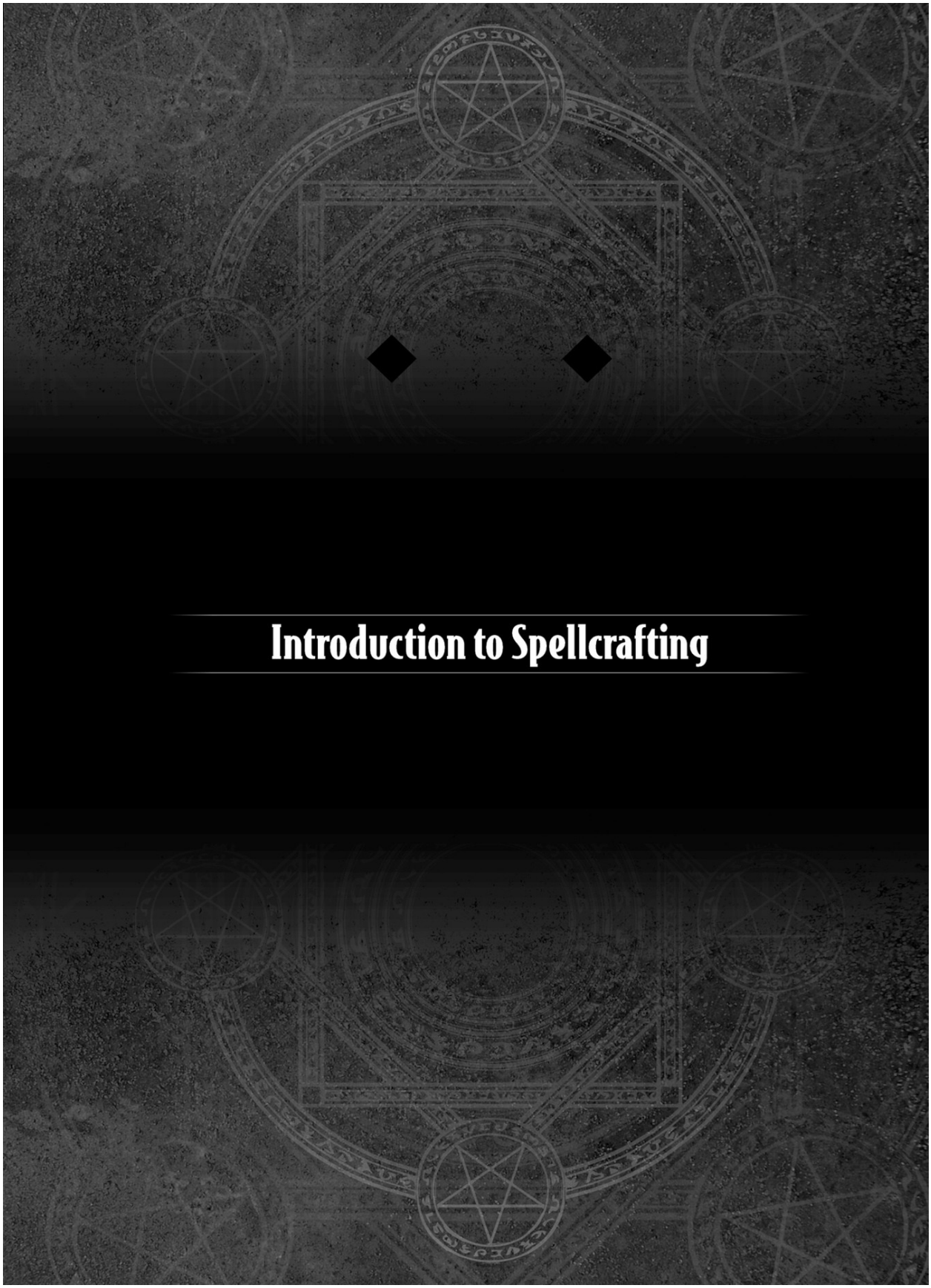
"Let's go, partner," I said with a smile and held out my right hand.

She extended her left hand in response. Her fingers slowly made their way to mine with what seemed like hesitation and timidity. I tightly gripped her hand, pulled her up, and lifted her. She hardly resisted. As such, I pulled much harder than necessary, and the two of us spun around.

It looked like we were dancing. I found this hilarious and unintentionally laughed.

Our faces suddenly drew close and our gazes locked. At this close distance, her beautiful ruby eyes shone as if filled with the light and warmth of the sun. Our shadows on the red earth overlapped each other and became one.

Come, this was just the beginning. With our hands and gazes locked, this was the story of our journey.



Introduction to Spellcrafting

VOLUME I – OUTLINE OF ALL ATTRIBUTES

The *Introduction to Spellcrafting* series is comprised of this first volume, which provides a broad explanation of all the attributes, and the following volumes, which are each dedicated to the delivery of concrete explanations of their respective attributes. Additionally, this volume describes a method to "discern one's attribute" as a means of identifying one's aptitude with each attribute.

VOLUME II – INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRE ATTRIBUTE

◎ FIRE SPELLS (CREATION TYPE; TRANSFORMS ENERGY*)

One of the Four Cornerstone Attributes. The attribute that controls intense heat. Many spells of this attribute are battle-oriented and characterized as attacks. Additionally, it boasts the best base-mana efficiency of the creation-type attributes and possesses the highest destructive capability per mana cost of all attributes. This attribute's clear strength and ease of use have garnered it widespread popularity.

**Attribute that converts mana into heat or kinetic energy. If excess mana is imbued, the amount of energy contained within the creation temporarily increases.*

VOLUME III – INTRODUCTION TO THE WIND ATTRIBUTE

◎ WIND SPELLS (CREATION TYPE; TRANSFORMS ENERGY)

One of the Four Cornerstone Attributes. The attribute that controls wind. It is extremely versatile, with spells ranging from attack and defense to movement and communication. If you train in this attribute, you will naturally become well-rounded. As such, having an aptitude for this attribute is something prospective spellcasters should deem a clear path to success. As with "mana beast users," a wide range of unique spellcasters rely primarily on this attribute.

VOLUME IV – INTRODUCTION TO THE EARTH ATTRIBUTE

◎ EARTH SPELLS (CREATION TYPE; CONVERTS MASS*)

One of the Four Cornerstone Attributes. The attribute that controls earth. Creation location is limited to the ground. Furthermore, the creation possesses mass, so the initial vector cannot be designated. Due to these qualities, many Earth spells are only useful in highly specific situations. Because of its extreme difficulty and lack of versatility, no spellcasters specialize solely in normal

Earth spells. Simultaneously, it is rare for someone with an aptitude for the Earth attribute to also display an aptitude for the Fire or Ice attributes.

However, the Earth attribute possesses one critical feature: The lost, ancient spells of the Earth attribute related to golems were far superior to those of the modern day, and compensated for the above-mentioned shortcomings. The powerful spellcasters who specialize in golems are known as "golem wielders."

** Attribute that converts mana into mass. If excess mana is imbued, the mass of the creation temporarily increases.*

VOLUME V – INTRODUCTION TO THE ICE ATTRIBUTE

◎ ICE SPELLS (CREATION TYPE; TRANSFORMS ENERGY)

One of the Four Cornerstone Attributes. The attribute that controls ice. Similar to the Earth attribute, the initial vector of creations cannot be designated. However, since creation can be designated in a specified location in the atmosphere, powerful attack spells are made possible by utilizing height difference and gravity. Also, Ice

spells possess shorter creation times than Earth spells. Because of these characteristics, this attribute is seen as compatible with the Earth attribute and related to the Water attribute. However, in actuality, this attribute is based on the manipulation of thermal energy, so it is more closely related to the Fire attribute. Among the creation-type attributes, it is second only to the Fire attribute in terms of mana efficiency.

VOLUME VI – INTRODUCTION TO THE WATER ATTRIBUTE

◎ WATER SPELLS (CREATION TYPE; CONVERTS MASS)

The attribute that controls water. Because the creations are fluids, the initial vector can be designated. While it may not possess many spells capable of direct attacks, the practicality of its spells is extremely wide and varied. It is worth mentioning the diversity of its healing spells. Among the known healing spells, about eighty percent are Water spells.

VOLUME VII – INTRODUCTION TO THE LIGHTNING ATTRIBUTE

◎ LIGHTNING SPELLS (CREATION TYPE; TRANSFORMS ENERGY)

The attribute that controls lightning. Many of its spells are idiosyncratic, but once a spellcaster is able to handle them, they are powerful indeed. Although many think of this attribute primarily for its lightning-based attacks, many Lightning spells are utilized in medical treatment and daily life. The illumination-type spells that produce light are particularly convenient and popular.

VOLUME VIII – INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE ATTRIBUTE

◎ LIFE SPELLS (CREATION TYPE; CONVERTS MASS)

The attribute that controls life and flesh. Possesses an extremely potent healing capability. With Life healing spells, a spellcaster can perform advanced medical treatment that would be largely impossible with only Water spells. Additionally, it is the only

attribute capable of healing missing body parts. It is extremely rare for someone to possess aptitude with this attribute, which has resulted in a dearth of experienced spellcasters.

VOLUME IX – INTRODUCTION TO THE VOID ATTRIBUTE

◎ VOID SPELLS (CREATION TYPE; TRANSFORMS ENERGY)

The attribute that controls nihility. Those humans with an aptitude for this attribute are capable of transforming their mana into a body of pure energy. Although not to the degree of the Life attribute, those with aptitude for this attribute are rare. While it may be accurate to call it the "Nothing attribute," it is rarely described as such. It boasts the fastest creation speed of all attributes.

Since it is difficult to see the trajectory of its spells, they are suitable for surprise attacks. It is believed that the barrier known as *Dragon Wall,* which is utilized by some higher-level dragons, is closely related to this attribute.

VOLUME X – INTRODUCTION TO THE BLOOD ATTRIBUTE

◎ BLOOD SPELLS (NON-CREATION TYPE; CONTROLS FLESH)

The attribute that boils blood. Enhances the body by using blood as its medium. Blood spells are limited to the caster's body, so only a few can be deployed at a time. Those who specialize in this attribute are known as "spell warriors." Although they are unconventional spellcasters, since they excel at physical combat, they are compatible in combat with golem wielders.

VOLUME XI – INTRODUCTION TO THE SPIRIT ATTRIBUTE

◎ SPIRIT SPELLS (NON-CREATION TYPE; CONTROLS SPIRIT)

The attribute that unravels memories and cognition. Affects the target's memories and unconscious mind. While the effects of these spells are astounding, the compensation required to cast them is especially costly. Therefore, this attribute is not suited for direct

combat. Those who specialize in this attribute are known as "curse casters." Additionally, the *Soul Transcription* spell that would have erased the protagonist's memories and overwritten his personality is one of the strongest spells of this attribute.

VOLUME XII - INTRODUCTION TO THE TIME ATTRIBUTE

◎ TIME SPELLS (NON-CREATION TYPE; CONTROLS TIME AND SPACE)

The attribute that manipulates space-time. Can interfere with spatiotemporal flow. Many spells of this attribute have peaceful uses, such as preserving food. However, the spell that summoned the protagonist into this world, *Summon the Sorcerer King of Destruction*, was also derived from this attribute. Due to the complexity of the fundamental tenet of time spells, they cannot be cast by a single spellcaster. Many spells are only effective if cast by a large number of spellcasters chanting in unison, or by a single caster with aid from a mana tool or spell circle.

Afterword

THANK YOU VERY MUCH for picking up this book. I am the author, Northcarolina.

The Sorcerer King of Destruction and the Golem of the Barbarian Queen started off as a novel published online under the same name. It has since then been completely revised, edited, and compiled into this volume.

When I first began writing this story in that small corner of the internet, I never imagined that it would one day appear on bookshelves in this form. I mean, it's a story with a bloodthirsty, stone-statue yandere as its heroine. When I lay out the story like that, it honestly sounds crazy. But it is also the case that, per the story, this statement is entirely true.

As this work was originally published online, I'm sure that one of the major concerns for readers is how much of the contents were changed when it was turned into a novel. As the creator of the original work, I was going to explain this in the afterword. However, now that I'm writing it, my honest opinion is, "Too much has changed, so it's hard to explain to first-time readers." In fact, my hand holding this small booklet-sized list of changes is beginning to sweat…

There are some easy-to-explain changes throughout the book, such as new scenes, but we've also added more world-building details. This was the desire that drove me: for readers to be able to casually enjoy the book while still offering new discoveries on each reread. I secretly hoped this work would be like a piece of squid, one where you can taste new elements every time you bite into it.

……

Because I've blurted out so many honest thoughts, I, as the creator, am reaching my mental limit, so I cannot continue much longer.

While this book was in the process of being published, I received help from many people. Everyone, please allow me to use this space to show my sincerest gratitude to them.

Firstly, I would like to thank the illustrator, Shiba-sama, for going along with my unreasonable demands while producing so many beautiful works of art; the designer, Boogie Design-sama, who completed this fantastic volume; the folks in charge of proofreading at the Tokyo Publication Service Center who carefully proofread my work; and the editor-in-chief, Fujita-sama, who clearly showed more enthusiasm for the heroine Gol than her creator.

And also: My thanks to the author of *Overlord*, Kugane Maruyama-sensei, who has been secretly supporting this work the whole time, without any networking or compensation in return.

And of course: My thanks to the folks who have warmly supported this work since its internet days. All their help has become the flesh and blood of

this book. If any one of them had passed this project by, there is no doubt it wouldn’t have turned out the way it did.

Thank you very much.

And…

To the one I wanted to thank the most: You, who bought this book and read it. I love you from the bottom of my heart. Please marry me.

—NORTHCAROLINA, JULY 2018

The Sorcerer King of Destruction and the Golem of the Barbarian Queen—

Congratulations on your publication!

Although I am inexperienced, I enjoyed drawing to the best of my ability for Northcarolina-sensei's lovely story. Thank you very much for picking this up!!

—SHIBA, JULY 2018

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